



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018



## Why Rod Brind'Amour is the right choice to lead the Hurricanes

Posted 6:00 a.m. today

By Adam Gold, 99.9 The Fan radio host

Raleigh, N.C. — Prior to Wednesday's official document signing, there had been four head coaches in [Carolina Hurricanes](#) history.

Rod Brind'Amour became the fifth, though if you wanted to count Paul Maurice twice — as he was hired and fired two times — I'll allow it.

None of them, however, were as uniquely qualified as is Brind'Amour to hold the post.

Maurice arrived with the club from Hartford in the summer of 1997 as the rare professional coach younger than some of his players. He grew into a very good bench boss, leading the Canes to the Stanley Cup Finals in 2002. Carolina has only reached the postseason five times since the relocation from Hartford, and "Mo" has been at the helm of four of those teams.

Peter Laviolette took over for Maurice in the middle of the 2003-04 season and guided the Canes to the 2006 Stanley Cup title following the locked out season.

Two and a half years later, he was replaced mid-stream by Maurice, and that spring the Canes got to the Eastern Conference Finals, where they were swept aside by the eventual Stanley Cup Champion Penguins. Following Maurice, it was Kirk Muller and then Bill Peters, two first-time NHL head coaches who each failed to reach the postseason in their seven combined seasons with the Hurricanes.

So why is Brind'Amour, who has never been the coach of record for any professional game, the right choice?

### Culture

So much has been made of a word that is very difficult to define within the realm of professional sports. Brind'Amour played for Maurice and Laviolette, then coached with Muller and Peters. He's seen what works — here — and what doesn't.

"We took our culture for granted for about 10 years," Brind'Amour told 99.9 The Fan following his introduction.

The successful Hurricanes teams were not loaded with talent as much as they were laden with high-character players, leaders and tireless workers.

"We don't need a better weight room," Brind'Amour said. "We need guys who want to get in the weight room."

Go back and look at the teams that had success in 2002, 2006 and 2009. Sure, there was talent — every team has talent. But it was leadership and accountability from within

and names like Hedican, Wesley, Whitney, Hill, Cole, Stillman, Ward, Cullen, Walker, Adams, and Williams, to go along with the high-end talent like Staal and O'Neill, that set the tone for the success of those teams.

### Competitive

The blood that coursed through the veins of those teams was the same. A relentless work ethic off the ice, a determined attitude on it and an uncanny ability to get under an opponent's skin at the right time. Scott Walker is far from one of the best to wear a Hurricanes uniform, but there isn't a fan worth his weight in vulcanized rubber who can't close his eyes and see "Walks" dropping (then Bruins) defenseman Aaron Ward with a questionable right hand during the 2009 playoffs.

Well, it wasn't actually questionable, it was very definite. But that sort of grit was indicative of more of the way the Canes had to play for most of the last decade.

That kind of agitation has been noticeably absent from recent years. Even more so over the last few as the team became more and more devoted to the analytical side of the sport.

"I think it makes you more prepared," Brind'Amour said of Carolina's recent usage of advanced metrics in their day-to-day approach to the game.

But there's a catch.

"Over these last four years we just couldn't have been any more prepared, but it didn't translate to wins and points," Brind'Amour said.

Make no mistake. Brind'Amour isn't so old school that he doesn't see the value in data that should help you win games, but it's only to a point.

"We have to have that competitive edge then add that other part. Without it, you don't have a chance," he said.

### Reality

With all of that said, Brind'Amour enters into this endeavor, a very personal mission, with eyes wide open.

"I know how it ends," he offered about the understanding that virtually every coach, no matter how successful, is ultimately temporary. "So now it's my job to make the story a good one, add a lot of great chapters before the ending."

He's right. Even the best coaches don't last forever. Scottie Bowman was fired. Joel Quenneville's missed the playoffs just three times in 21 years behind an NHL bench and won three Cups and he's been fired — twice.

But what's different is that Bowman was more coaching legend than player and Quenneville was just a good player



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

— mostly for the Whalers, coincidentally — falling far short of legendary status. Neither came to their jobs attached to the legacies of the team they were charged with leading.

Brind'Amour's number hangs in the rafters at PNC Arena. The image of him hoisting the Cup over his head in June of 2006 is ingrained in every Hurricanes fan.

He is the greatest and most beloved player to ever wear the Carolina uniform. But as we talked about his stature and his place in this team's history, he knew that the name and number of Ron Francis also waved prominently overhead. And he understands fully that no matter how much of a hero he'll always be to the fans who file into the building, it's still a bottom line business.

"I've had conversations with Tom about the landing — when it is over," Brind'Amour said of his chats with owner Tom Dundon. "I don't ever want to be in a position to not want to walk into this building."

I don't think that will ever be the case, regardless of how this turns out. Brind'Amour is home here in Raleigh. He played longer here than he did in Philadelphia. The Hurricanes have been in North Carolina for 20 years, and Brind'Amour's been here for 17 of them. He's got a connection to every player and every coach who's ever worn the sweater. This is personal to him. It isn't about money or fame or credit.

To be the head coach at a time when the team desperately needs someone to alter the current course of events, there's no one better to ask than the player who's arrival in a January trade in 2000 completely changed the fate of the franchise.

Rod Brind'Amour was that player then. And while there are no guarantees, I wouldn't bet against him being THAT coach now. This is Rod Brind'Amour's team. It's also his time.

## TriangleSportsNetwork

### Koutroumpis: Carolina Hurricanes make moves, but haven't traveled far yet

**Off-office changes create illusion of progress, team still the same**

[May 15, 2018 Peter Koutroumpis Carolina Hockey Network, Carolina Hurricanes, Triangle Sports Network, Triangle Sports Roundup](#)

By Peter Koutroumpis

[editor@trianglesportsnet.com](mailto:editor@trianglesportsnet.com)

RALEIGH, N.C. – If you've read recent press clippings, it has appeared like a lot has changed with the Carolina Hurricanes.

However, when you really think about it, not much is different.

With the announcement of former team captain and Stanley Cup winner Rod Brind'Amour as the new head coach of the Carolina Hurricanes on May 8<sup>th</sup>, it seemed apropos to theme the team's last month of existence as that of running on a treadmill.

Sure, the workout fiend that Brind'Amour is will fuel lots of energy and movement and enhance a positive attitude among the players both on and off the ice.

However, viewing from the wider lens since the final game of the regular season, this team has expended energy trying to 'get better', but with little to show for it so far.

That's how running on a treadmill works – setting the pace of the belt to cycle how fast or slow you want to go which accommodates where and how you swing your legs to allow your feet to make contact and avoid falling on your face.

You jump off after your defined 'workout' time at a specific intensity level ends, look at the numbers on the screen, and feel good that it tells you've traveled a certain distance.

The Hurricanes have been busy running the treadmill as majority owner Tom Dundon has changed the look of the front office significantly.

Former executive vice president and [general manager Ron Francis was unceremoniously fired](#) and had his contract terminated, and after not finding a desired nor willing external candidate, Don Waddell was announced as team president and general manager last week too.

After [former head coach Bill Peters bolted to Calgary](#), exercising an 'out' clause in his contract which appeared to be mutually agreeable with Dundon, Brind'Amour was then named Carolina's new bench boss.

Thus, a new GM and head coach are the only 'pieces' the Hurricanes have changed so far.

Sure, the addition of Rick Dudley and Paul Krepelka as senior vice president and vice president of hockey operations, respectively, were additional moves made to reinforce the front office with the loss of the one-man machine Francis was, but this team is still literally the same.

Yes, I've stated the obvious.

Though some drops of sweat might have fallen, an actual distance hasn't been traveled.

The true journey to be taken will be to make significant changes to the team's playing roster which to date is still the same.

That's the news we're all waiting for.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

No fine-tuning or adjusting with prospects, but some hard, gut-wrenching moves of loved veteran players moving out with new ones coming in.

No more facilitating player popularity with fan allegiance via sympathetic marketing and promotions strategies that have been used in the past.

That will only continue to provide the euphoric impression of making progress running on the treadmill with no tangible postseason outcomes – a nine-year trend that must change.

Only until this team and organization is ready to travel a long, hard road, with everyone's soles hitting actual pavement, and experiencing pain as part of the adaptation-to-change process, will a true distance be covered to a more promised land than where it sits now.



## Hurricanes Next Netminder Could Be 'Ned'

By [Mark Shiver](#) May 14th, 2018

Alex Nedeljkovic is currently the goaltender for the Charlotte Checkers. His play this season and in particular in the Calder Cup playoffs has moved him into a place of conversation about playing at the next level. The Carolina Hurricanes need to fix their challenges in goal and Nedeljkovic could be the answer, or at least part of the answer going forward.

### Who is "Ned?"

Nedeljkovic is a lot to try to keep track of, so most people just call him, "Ned." Whatever name he goes by, it's likely it is one that Hurricanes fans will be saying and hearing quite a bit in the near, or, at least, not too distant future. Born in Parma, Ohio, Nedeljkovic was drafted in the second round of the 2014 NHL Entry Draft.

Nedeljkovic was profiled in the 2014 edition of The Hockey Writers prospect profile, "The Next Ones." [Anatoliy Metter wrote of Nedeljkovic](#), "Many probably didn't expect Alex Nedeljkovic to burst onto the OHL scene when he was selected by the Plymouth Whalers with the 123rd overall pick in the 2012 OHL Priority Selection. However, Nedeljkovic has not only played his way into the starting goaltending role in Plymouth, he has provided his team and organization with stability in the Whalers' crease as well as a mentality and demeanor of a goalie well beyond eighteen years of age."

His play with the Plymouth Whalers caught the attention of NHL scouts. But, Nedeljkovic has been impressing scouts and coaches throughout his blossoming career. Might the next step be the bright lights of NHL ice?

Nedeljkovic played in one NHL game in the 2016-17 season and saved all 17 shots he faced. Ordinarily, he would not be in conversations about playing full-time for the Hurricanes at this point. He could definitely use more experience with the Checkers. But, his play in the Calder Cup playoffs has given folks pause to think, "Hmm, maybe Nedeljkovic might be ready."

### Calder Cup Play

[Nedeljkovic played extremely well for the Checkers](#) in their failed pursuit of the Calder Cup. In eight games, he was 4-4 with a 2.11 goals against average and a .919 save percentage. Included in these stats was a game that set a

new record for the longest game in American Hockey League history, a five-overtime loss to the Lehigh Valley Phantoms. Nedeljkovic stopped 51 of 53 shots on goal in the 2-1 Checkers' loss.

It is this outing that has started the whispering about Nedeljkovic possibly needing a look for the next level. He had a good season and played well in the postseason. Eyebrows are raised, and, with the current Hurricanes goaltender situation, Nedeljkovic has become a legit topic of conversation.

### Nedeljkovic In the Conversation

Chip Alexander of the *Raleigh News & Observer* wrote recently that [Nedeljkovic might be in the mix](#) as a possible Hurricanes goaltender. He posed this thought on the possibility of a new name in the goaltender mix:

The Canes could again go with the tandem of Cam Ward and Scott Darling — if Ward is re-signed, and if Darling can return in better physical condition, find a better comfort zone in net and be a lot more effective. Or there could be a new mix, with Nedeljkovic trying to stick with the big team.

There were two big "ifs" in that statement, Ward being re-signed, which is likely, and Darling being more effective. The jury is still out on that possibility. After Nedeljkovic's recent play in the AHL postseason for the Checkers, Alexander's speculation might be worth serious consideration. He wrote also the glowing words of Nedeljkovic's coach Mike Vellucci:

He has made such huge strides this year. Everybody wrote him off last year like he wasn't a good goalie as a rookie, but he's proven everyone wrong this year. He's a heck of a goaltender and heck of a prospect.

The key word is "prospect," because even with Nedeljkovic's stalwart play, he still might not be ready. He struggled his first season as a professional, but his second has him on the right track. He [dropped his regular season GAA](#) from 3.40 in 2016-17 to 2.55, and his SV% from .881 to .903. No one is saying he is Patrick Roy, but he is a part of the Hurricanes organization that deserves to be kept front of mind.

An unrestricted free agent, Ward has said he wants to come back, but he is clearly on the back side of his career. Darling was barely NHL-ready as a starter last season and has a lot



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

to prove ahead of him. If head coach Rod [Brind'Amour wants to extend his honeymoon](#) with the fans, he will address the goaltending situation without delay.

Maybe the Hurricanes will best be served by looking at who is available around the league and trying to acquire a proven veteran. Absent that, Nedeljkovic might be good to have in the stable going forward. It's worth a thought.



## Aho among Hurricanes excited about having Brind'Amour as coach

**Players believe changes could lead to Carolina improving on sixth-place finish in Metropolitan Division**

by Aaron Vickers / NHL.com Correspondent

May 14th, 2018

**HERNING, Denmark** -- [Sebastian Aho](#) is one of several Carolina Hurricanes players excited by the hiring of Rod Brind'Amour as coach.

"I'm sure he wants everyone to earn everything," said Aho, who is playing with Finland at the 2018 IIHF World Championship. "I saw what he said, everyone has to earn their spot in the lineup and on the power play. You have to earn it. There's going to be a lot of competition. It's good."

Brind'Amour, 47, was named coach May 8, replacing Bill Peters. The same day president Don Waddell was named general manager.

"The new owner (Tom Dundon) came in and there was a lot of change," said Aho, who led the Hurricanes with 65 points (29 goals, 36 assists) in 78 games. "Obviously everyone wants to win. With those changes we obviously just want to be a better team."

"I think we have a chance to be."

Brind'Amour had been an assistant coach the previous seven seasons, and he'll bring a different mentality than Peters, who resigned April 20 and was hired to coach the Calgary Flames three days later.

"I like him as an assistant coach and now he's going to have the chance to be the head coach," said forward [Teuvo Teravainen](#), who was second on the Hurricanes with 64

points (23 goals, 41 assists). "I'm pretty excited about it. He's been a tough guy, a good two-way player, so I think he's going to be really tough and we're going to play really hard, competing hard and not taking days off."

"You have to work every day to be responsible and that's what I think he'll bring."

Carolina finished sixth in the Metropolitan Division, and 14 points behind the New Jersey Devils for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference this season. It was the ninth straight season the Hurricanes have missed the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

That meant changes, which Dundon, who became majority owner Jan. 11, started when he reassigned Ron Francis, who had been GM since 2014, to president of hockey operations March 7 and fired him April 30. Peters also left after four seasons as coach.

Hurricanes goaltender [Scott Darling](#), playing for the United States at Worlds, said having a familiar face like Brind'Amour as the coach will help the adjustment.

"I texted Rod, 'Congratulations,'" said Darling, who went 13-21-7 with a 3.18 goals-against average and .888 save percentage in 43 games in his first season with Carolina.

"He's a great guy. He's passionate. When he was an assistant coach, he was great for me, and we've decided to have him as a head coach. It's good to see the organization moving in the right direction."

"We're all adaptable, but it definitely makes it a little easier. You know him already. There's no awkward get-to-know-you phase, so it makes it a little easier."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

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# SportScan

Articles from outlets covering the Hurricanes' upcoming opponents and league-wide news

1096343 Websites

The Athletic / Bourne: How Tampa Bay can better get through Washington's neutral zone forecheck

By Justin Bourne May 14, 2018

Throughout the regular season, the Tampa Bay Lightning were the NHL's most dangerous offensive team. After 82 games they had lit the lamp 290 times – an average of 3.54 goals per game – which is the highest total the NHL has seen since the 2009-10 Washington Capitals. Nine players had at least 40 points, not counting Ondrej Palat who was five shy despite missing 26 games.

This team can obviously pour pucks in the net, and they had throughout the year — until now.

The Lightning have scored just four times through two games against Braden Holtby and the Capitals, which isn't terrible, but it certainly isn't representative of just how deadly they can be.

Now, if you felt like listing off reasons the Lightning didn't win either of the first two games, you'd obvious highlight the whole "giving up 10 goals in two games" thing as the bigger problem. But that'd miss the point – the two things are inextricably combined.

To my eye, it looks as though Tampa Bay is having trouble cracking the Capitals neutral zone forecheck, which means they aren't entering the offensive zone with possession, if they're entering it at all. They're often having rushes snuffed out before they begin, which leaves Washington in the offensive zone, while the Lightning are denied opportunities to even use their firepower.

This brings us to the most common coaching strategy against the best offensive players. "Yes, Connor McDavid is an absolute offensive demon, but if he's playing in his own zone, he can't hurt us." Likewise, Nikita Kucherov is a lot less dangerous standing still 150 feet from the Capitals cage.

Washington's neutral zone is a 1-1-3, which is exactly what you think it is.

I highlighted that here, in this post on the Evgeny Kuznetsov overtime winner against Pittsburgh, where the Caps neutral zone forecheck (NZFC from now on) creates the turnover that leads the eventual game winner.

Basically the first forward is to steer the puck to one side (preferably the side where they have their defenceman out wide). After the pass is

made, if the second forward can jump the puck carrier before the red line to force a rushed play or an icing, that would be ideal.

On that OT winner I mentioned, Washinton's F1 is maybe a bit more passive than they'd like, but it was more circumstantial – just in terms of how the play unfolded – that he ended up that far back. Anyway, this isn't a referendum on that goal, this is just for explanatory purposes. Here's the 1-1 part of the 1-1-3:

Then as the camera pans back, you can see "3," with Ovechkin overtop the Penguins winger who had stretched all the way to the blueline.

The idea with a 1-1-3 is just KISS – keep it simple, stupid. F1 pushes the puck to one side of the ice, and F2 jumps while denying the pass across the ice. Please note the use of italics there, as that's the whole ballgame here. If F2 can't get there before the red, he's to provide back pressure on the puck (as Kuznetsov did on the aforementioned goal, leading to the turnover).

When the puck is on one side of the ice, everyone shifts in that direction and tries to essentially trap the puck carrier. F2 is either going to get to him, or the D-man is going to force him to dump the puck in.

It's a very easy read for Washington when the puck stays on one side of the ice. As you can imagine, if that D steps up and forces a dump, the other two members of the "3" simply fold underneath, the D can retrieve the dump, and the other member of the "3" can get back deep to do whatever's necessary. Maybe that means offering a passing option if the recovery player has time and space, maybe defending the front of the net until the other D can get back, maybe defending low as the "centre" (first guy back) if the opposing team wins the race to the dump.

So that's about as simple a NZFC plan as you can lay out. It's fairly easy to execute, and because that F1 is so passive, you never lose anyone who tries to get too aggressive. This is the main issue with NZFCs that have more aggressive F1s (or those that send two forwards) – if they're running at the opposing D trying to steal the puck and they get beat by a pass or skated by, they're opposing team instantly has numbers. Against the more talented teams (think, say, Pittsburgh and Tampa Bay), that would be problematic.

Another reason to set up like this in the neutral zone is it keeps the opposition out of the middle. As an offensive player, that's a question you're usually subconsciously trying to answer – how do we enter the zone through the middle, where we can have options on both sides? With two forwards in the middle of the ice forcing the puck to the outside, you eliminate that threat entirely, which seems pretty smart given all the speed and skill on Tampa's roster.

Is it an exciting system? No, my friend, it is not. But as I said – you're guaranteed to have all your players back defending, and nobody's



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

chasing the play, and the puck's out of the middle. Those are good things.

So in this series, we've heard the Tampa players talking about accepting that they may have to dump pucks to get through the neutral zone and into the O-zone, and in many cases, that indeed will be the case. But when they have the puck with solid possession there are a few tools they can use to reestablish their greatest attribute – that speed and skill – rather than becoming a dump-and-recover team, which simply isn't their game.

They can...

Switch sides

This is the most obvious, or at least easiest to say, strategy. Executing is another thing. The Bolts can get the puck to one side of the ice, hopefully pull F2 out of the middle as he tries to confront the puck carrier before the red line, then move the puck back across the ice. With F2 pulled out, you can then enter through the middle, and finally have some options as you enter the offensive zone. The player most sagged in the "3" is in the middle too, so that's where they Bolts would find the worst defensive gap, too.

Further, the weak-side part of the back "3" will have drifted toward the middle and farther back, preparing to help his teammate on a potential dump recovery. So even if Tampa can't get back to the middle, that wide defender's positioning and gap would likely be off, too.

As I noted in my italicized words above, this is easier said than done, as the opposing F2's main goal is to isolate the puck on that one side. He's essential playing cross-ice goalie with a good stick as he closes.

As I see it, there are about three viable ways to get the puck across the ice.

\* One is what essentially amounts to a cross-ice dump. Basically, don't get cute and try to feather one through the defender, just rip it laterally across the ice, waist-high, whatever, and let your teammate skate onto the puck. I've long been a lateral-dump advocate. Any time you can go side to side you force defensive decisions, which inevitably leads to breakdowns.

\* In keeping with the theme of ripping it, you can basically do this at your teammate. I've heard pro players tell each other to just fire the puck at them, because they'll catch it and sort it out. Most of these guys are pretty damn good athletes. "You can't give a good player a bad pass" might be the most engrained idiom in all of pro hockey. Just get it over to the guy, he'll sort it out.

\* Finally, and most likely, a spot pass. As soon as F2 starts to attack, the weak-side winger on the rush can head to the middle where F2 once was, and the puck carrier can lead him with a spot pass to that area that you know is going to be open. That allows him to not have to pass it through F2, but still gets the puck in the right hands.

Other than that, I mean, these are some of the best offensive players in the league. They're going to have to make some plays to win this series, and that may include finding ways to pass pucks through a neutral zone that takes away the middle. They're creative. They just have to find a way to get that puck back to the weak side.

Bring everyone all the way back

Most teams stretch a forward in hopes of pulling out the opposing D – said opposing D can't just let a guy stand unmarked at the far blue, after all – which should create more room in the neutral zone. The Bolts periodically employ this strategy just like everyone else.

But with Washington sagging three players back, they're basically just skating a player into traffic and limiting their passing options as they head up the ice with four skaters (and just two forwards). That ain't working out so hot. On regroup, the Bolts could bring everyone all the way back underneath, and basically head up the ice as five (with three forwards). The idea would just be to have more short support pass options (instead

of an all-or-nothing boards-to-boards pass attempt), which would also give them three forwards attacking with speed, as opposed to just two with one at a stand still.

That would help as well with the next idea, which is...

They absolutely need a slasher

I'm aware this is basic as can be, and is likely something they're trying to do (but failing to execute). But I've seen too many deep dump-ins where Tampa's only support forward (only, as the other one is often flat-footed at the blue) is unable to get to the deeper dumps because the Caps D have been anticipating them. If the Lightning do feel they have to put the puck in without control, they need to do a better job using touch chips while having a forward with speed slash through the middle so they're able to get the first touch. Again, bringing all five guys back on a regroup would help here too. I really believe attacking as five – with those short support options – will help them get through the middle better.

Too often the first touch has gone to the opposition on dumps when a little chip would allow them to get on offence.

Finally – and I won't even bother with the bolding of a sub-header here – they just need to execute better. As we discussed off the top, this is the best offence the NHL has seen in eight seasons. They're too damn talented to see a neutral zone forecheck that puts a player in the middle of the ice and set their hair on fire in panic. A few teams around the league employ this, it's not like they wouldn't have seen it before.

But, it has been effective at shutting them down through two games, which has led to more time in the wrong zone. If they're going to climb back in this series on the road, the first step they need to take is to find a better way through Washington's neutral zone.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.15.2018

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The Athletic / From subtle to spectacular, Nate Schmidt does it all as Golden Knights – and Schmidt – continue to surprise

By Michael Russo May 15, 2018

WINNIPEG – On his first shift, Nate Schmidt swept a puck out of harm's way that came off the stick of star Jets center Mark Scheifele and got behind Marc-Andre Fleury. On his last shift, Schmidt dropped to the ice to intercept a cross-crease pass destined for the stick of Scheifele with a gaping net a few feet away.

In between, Schmidt did it all Monday night to help the Vegas Golden Knights seize home-ice advantage in the Western Conference final by earning a Winnipeg split with a 3-1 Game 2 victory to at least temporarily pour some "whiteout" on the Jets' early parade route plans.

Eight hours south in Woodbury, Minn., Mike Guentzel watched Schmidt, his former University of Minnesota pupil, with pride.

This is a defenseman who a year ago was healthy-scratched for all but seven of 21 regular-season games after the Washington Capitals acquired Kevin Shattenkirk at the trade deadline.

At one point Monday – whether it was when Schmidt drew a penalty, or maybe when he forced a turnover that led to Jonathan Marchessault's first of two goals, or perhaps when he closed a gap perfectly to force a Jets player offside or used body position to knock Scheifele, the NHL's leading playoff goal scorer, off the puck – Guentzel said to his buddy: "He's a \$5 million player on his next contract."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

"Every time I watch Nate, I'm more and more impressed with his game," Guentzel, the former Gophers associate coach and the father of Pittsburgh Penguins young stud Jake Guentzel, told The Athletic by phone during the second intermission. "He never hardly makes any mistakes. He just makes subtle good plays followed by absolutely terrific plays. He gets pucks out when the team is under pressure. He's got a great stick. He's always on the right side of the check and he always moves people away from the scoring areas and does a great job of angling people.

"And he's just got endless energy."

Schmidt, 26, displayed all of that Monday in a game in which Golden Knights coach Gerard Gallant tried to match him and defense partner Brayden McNabb against Winnipeg's star-studded top line of Kyle Connor, Scheifele and Blake Wheeler.

After the game, Schmidt was prouder of keeping that trio off the board at even-strength than pressuring Connor into a turnover that led to Marchessault's breakaway goal after linemate Reilly Smith bumped Connor off the puck in the first period.

"You want to challenge yourself every night, playing against a great line that's been really good in the playoffs," said Schmidt, a fifth-year pro. "And you want to be able to leave your mark on the game. We're leaving our mark on the game right now."

Schmidt, always tenacious, always in your face because he's such a great skater and hard worker, said he did his best to smother Scheifele all game by checking with his feet.

"With a guy like that, he likes to use his body, he's got a quick release," Schmidt said. "For me, it's just using a good stick and making sure he's uncomfortable in his position. It's not going to come through big hits. It's going to come through positioning and having a good stick, and that's something I thought tonight Brayden and I did a really good job doing."

The Golden Knights rebounded from Saturday's Game 1 loss by playing more of a north-south game early and forechecking the Jets into turnover after turnover in the first period. The Jets coughed up the puck three straight shifts before Tomas Tatar, inserted into the lineup for Oscar Lindberg, scored the game's opening goal after he forced Paul Stastny into a turnover.

Tatar, acquired at the trade deadline from Detroit for a first-, second- and third-round pick, is coming off his fourth straight 20-goal season yet was scratched in seven of 11 previous playoff games and had zero points.

"What a luxury to be able to put Tomas Tatar into a game in the playoffs," Schmidt said. "The guy has been an incredible player in this league and proved it for many years. And to be able to go out there and do what he did ... that's what I think the mojo of this team is. What it boils down to is we have a group of guys that is collectively pulling on the same rope and making sure they are ready at all times.

"He can go in there and play on any different line, I really think so. And that's what makes our team, the depth and having those guys that you can plug into the lineup and go and do a job and be impactful in a game, you can't ask for much more than that."

Schmidt is one of those guys who can't believe where he has come in the past 13 months.

Late last season, Guentzel called Schmidt when he was scratched during a game in Colorado to ask, "How the hell you're not playing?"

Schmidt told him that after the Shattenkirk deal, the Capitals told him he would not play unless there was an injury. Three of those seven games he did play down the stretch only occurred because Shattenkirk coincidentally got suspended.

In the playoffs, Schmidt missed the first two games until Karl Alzner was injured.

"He played so well, Washington had to play 11 forwards and seven defensemen when Alzner got back because they couldn't take Nate Schmidt out of the lineup," Guentzel said, laughing.

Schmidt said he understands why it was tough to find ice time on a Capitals blueline filled with Olympians and World Cup participants.

But Schmidt got a new lease on life when the Golden Knights took him in the expansion draft, and he ended up scoring a career-high 36 points in 76 games.

"The thing is about this year, (Gallant and assistant coach Ryan McGill) just kind of believed in what we can do and just put us all in roles that we can succeed in," Schmidt said. "And here I am and just couldn't be happier with the situation we're in and how we're playing and how I've developed into this new role on this new team."

Schmidt has overcome odds his entire career. This is a kid who wasn't drafted by any of 30 NHL franchises.

Guentzel recruited Schmidt to the University of Minnesota during his sophomore year at St. Cloud Cathedral but ended up leaving the Gophers himself for a few years to coach elsewhere. So Guentzel didn't coach Schmidt his freshman year with the Gophers.

That year, Schmidt was rotating between forward and defense and hated it. Over Christmas, he actually fielded calls from a few major junior teams and considered leaving the program.

"Well, I was playing forward," Schmidt said, laughing. "My mom (JoAnn), I don't think would allow me to not go to school anyway."

Schmidt decided to stick it out, and Guentzel ended up returning to the school during Schmidt's sophomore year.

"We were working the power play maybe the third practice of the year, and I looked at (former head coach) Don (Lucia) and said, 'There's the power-play quarterback,'" Guentzel said. "He just had that 'it' factor, he had a swagger on the blueline and that confidence. And he just would get pucks through, and this was a team with (Nick) Bjugstad and (Erik) Haula."

Schmidt worked hard at changing his body. He got leaner and stronger and quicker, his endurance improved, and he just took off until signing a free-agent contract with Washington after his junior year.

"It's another example of something that went right," said Golden Knights GM George McPhee, who coincidentally signed Schmidt with the Capitals. "He wasn't playing a lot with his previous team. I think they planned on playing him a lot this year. We saw something in him that we thought we could use that would be good for our club. The speed, the mobility and the commitment.

"He happens to be a great kid. It's funny how things go. We signed him as a free agent out of college. He was as quiet as a church mouse. He never said much. Now he's sort of comfortable in his own skin and not so quiet. But he's talkative in a good way, in a fun way. He's really good for this club."

The bubbly Schmidt, who frankly is a motormouth when you get to know him, proved that Monday night.

Dissect his shifts, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a single error.

"I thought Nate had a great game," said Haula, his former college teammate and now teammate in Sin City. "It's fun to watch him. It's fun to see him turn into the player he's developed into. He's showing everyone how good he is. I'm very happy he's on my team again."

The Western Conference final suddenly has a different dynamic now that Vegas, a team that played without David Perron, who was "not feeling well," snagged a victory and returns home for Game 3 Wednesday night with the series tied at 1-1.

Marchessault, who called Monday's game a "must-win" and said two nights earlier that we'd all learn a lot about this Vegas team with how it



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

performs in Game 2, scored two beautiful goals, the second set up by his linemates William Karlsson and Smith off marvelous plays.

Now, Schmidt and the Golden Knights hope to put some more doubt in the Jets' mind.

"We've got to make sure we come out with the same intensity that we did tonight and maybe a little bit extra," he said. "They're not going to roll over for us. They're going to come back with a better game. Our fans are going to be excited to see us. We're going to be excited to see them as well."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.15.2018

1096345 Websites

The Athletic / LeBrun: Jets ridiculous defensive depth leaves a now-healthy Dmitry Kulikov on the sidelines

By Pierre LeBrun May 14, 2018

WINNIPEG — Dmitry Kulikov took the ice during the Jets' optional practice Sunday, wearing the same colour sweater as any other healthy defenceman, and a reminder that Winnipeg has yet another bullpen piece waiting if need be.

Whether we ever see the Russian blueliner in these playoffs remains to be seen but that the fact last summer's UFA signing, projected to be an important part of the team this season, could be an yet another option underlines the ridiculous depth this team has at its disposal.

For starters, and every Jets fan alive should be knocking on wood as I say this, it's bizarre how healthy the team has been at this time of year when most teams begin to pay the price for the grind of the playoff run. With Kulikov having shed the non-contact sweater last week, they have their full complement of players after battling injuries all season long.

(Although let's see how Toby Enstrom feels Monday after that big hit he took from James Neal in Game 1. He finished the game but didn't skate on Sunday).

Either way, it would be easy to gloss over Kulikov since he's been out two months recovering from a back injury, but it would be a mistake to forget him.

"Oh gosh yeah, he's far from out of mind, there's no question about it," Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said Sunday. "He's probably understating what he's gone through even from the medical standpoint, the rehab and all that. It's obviously an ongoing process when you haven't played for that many months. From our perspective, if you plan on going long, you have to have all the horses available to you."

The 2011 Vancouver Canucks had nine defencemen play at least five games apiece in the long grind of their Stanley Cup final run.

In baseball, you can never have enough arms, and in hockey that's blueliners.

Consider that Joe Morrow was terrific pairing with Dustin Byfuglien in the first round against Minnesota and lost his place in the lineup once Enstrom returned for Round 2. Rookie Tucker Poolman also looked cool on the big stage when he played in Games 4 and 5 against Minnesota.

In fact, Morrow is probably the next man up, not Kulikov, if we had to guess.

"I think we have one of the deepest, if not the deepest, back end in the league," said Jets defenceman Tyler Myers. "It's a good problem to have

especially at this time of year. It's nice to know if one guy comes out for any reason that we have more than capable players to jump in."

It was Myers who paired mostly with Kulikov earlier in the season.

"If you go back to when he was playing, we were on a pretty good roll at the beginning of the year when our six D had him in it; he was playing with Tyler Myers and that was a pretty solid pair," said Cheveldayoff.

"It's unfortunate Kuli has gone through what he has the last couple of months here," added Myers. "But I think he's been good for us all year when he was playing. We've played together for a lot of it. At the start, it took a little bit for us to get used to each other and figure each other out, but we talked to each other a lot off the ice and during games, we tried to communicate as much as we could. I know he's excited to get back."

Oh, he is.

"It's been fun to watch the team win, the guys have been doing an unbelievable job, it's hard to get to where we're at now," Kulikov said. "For me, it's tough because I'm not playing but I'm happy for the guys that are on the ice and doing the job."

Not that he's surprised the Jets are on this run. Why do you think he signed with them last July?

"Because I knew the potential of this team," said Kulikov, who signed a three-year, \$13-million deal. "The group of guys that we have, I had a feeling that this group could potentially go on to win the Stanley Cup. It was an easy decision because we all want to win and I want to be part of that. When I made the decision, I had a belief in this group."

The belief was a two-way street. Cheveldayoff saw a player in Kulikov who could elevate his game for this time of year.

"One of the things that really appealed to me in signing him was how he played in the playoffs for Florida two years ago, I thought he was one of their top defencemen if not their top defenceman," said the Jets GM, who also got good insight from Jets scout Jack Birch who was in the Panthers organization when they drafted Kulikov 14th overall in 2009.

It just so happens that Winnipeg's opposition in the Western Conference final is a Vegas team coached by Gerard Gallant, who had Kulikov in Florida.

"Kuli played really well for me in Florida, the two years I was there," Gallant said. "Works hard, competes hard; he's a solid guy both ways. He's good defensive defender and he's a guy that can move the puck and skate real well. He's a big loss for them, I hope I don't see him in this series, but he's a real good hockey player and a good person."

You just know how much it's killing Kulikov to have already missed a big chunk of the playoffs, the part of year that makes everything else worth it when you're a player.

"It's the funnest part of the year," said Kulikov. "That's when you're enjoying hockey. The grind of the regular season is done. We're all just going out there and having fun playing hard and playing for each other. That's the idea when you're in the playoffs, you put everything on the line."

For now, all he can do is continue to put himself closer to getting that call.

"At this point I'm trying to get as healthy as I can and waiting for a chance to get in the lineup," said Kulikov.

Could he play Monday if the coach asked?

"Sure ... I could play," Kulikov smiled. "I've been cleared for contact to practice with the team and see how it's going to feel to practice at the normal pace with the contact. Once that happened, I've just been taking it day by day like every other guy in here. Just training and seeing how my injury responds. It's getting there."

There would have to be a clear reason, however, to mess with the lineup at this point.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

"First, there has to be a need in your lineup," head coach Paul Maurice when asked about that delicate decision with a guy like Kulikov. "Do you feel you have a need? We're comfortable with our back end. And then, he's been out for a while now, you watch the ice to see how he's going. We're really comfortable with where he's gotten to, we also really liked Joe Morrow's game when he was in; so we have some depth there as well."

A ton of depth. The kind Stanley Cup championship teams normally have.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.15.2018

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Sportsnet.ca / With Jets putting him to test, Golden Knights' Fleury aces Game 2

Chris Johnston | May 15, 2018, 1:39 AM

WINNIPEG – There were a few raised eyebrows in the Vegas Golden Knights dressing room when Patrik Laine suggested before this series that Marc-Andre Fleury hadn't really been tested during the playoffs.

On Monday night, Laine's Winnipeg Jets put Fleury to the test. And he passed with flying colours.

The biggest reason this Western Conference final is knotted up as we head for Sin City is that Fleury held the fort. It wasn't a work of art. He often had to battle for positioning in the crease during a 30-save performance that included some help from his posts – something Flower acknowledged by gently patting the iron after Andrew Copp had him beat in the second period.

The Vegas goaltender also denied Laine on four separate occasions. The Finn is the most dangerous shooter in this series and wasn't too concerned about the fact his observation about Fleury's spring was perceived by some Golden Knights as a slight.

"I don't care if they don't like it," Laine told reporters in Finnish after a 3-1 loss. "That's not my problem."

The Jets built a 3-0 lead before Saturday's series opener was even eight minutes old and had enough quality looks to do something similar in Game 2. There was an early Nikolaj Ehlers shot off the crossbar – his goal drought now stands at a career-worst 16 games – and a Mark Scheifele solo effort that squeaked through Fleury's pads but didn't have enough steam to reach the goal-line.

Kyle Connor had a dangerous-looking rush before Jacob Trouba stepped off his point and found the puck on his stick in the slot.

"They came out flying again," said Fleury. "The first one [from Scheifele], it just trickled. Hit both my pads, behind my knees. I was a little worried, but my defence showed up."

Weathering that storm gave his teammates a chance to find their footing. Vegas did a much better job of establishing a forecheck in the second half of the opening period – disrupting the Winnipeg breakout and forcing turnovers that lead to goals by Tomas Tatar and Jonathan Marchessault four minutes apart.

When the Jets regrouped and mounted another strong push in the second period, Fleury was there again.

The three-time Stanley Cup champion serves as a safety blanket for the first-year team. He arrived with the best resume of any of the players procured in the expansion draft last June. Not even a full year later, Fleury's riding a .945 save percentage in these playoffs and turned aside all 12 of Winnipeg's high-danger scoring chances in Game 2.

The heat map tells the story of a night where the goaltending made the difference:

That's not to throw any shade in Connor Hellebuyck's direction. The Jets goalie was beaten on Grade "A" looks, with Marchesseault scoring his first goal on a breakaway and being left alone to get a second with 12 minutes remaining.

But games are often won at this time of year through the execution of small details like the extra save or the big play.

"There was about 57 minutes of that game that was pretty good for us," said Jets captain Blake Wheeler. "Three minutes of it got away from us. They could have scored four goals in three minutes. We just gotta stay with it better. Realize that they have some guys on their team that can make plays as well.

"There's going to be moments in this series where they get scoring chances. They're gonna create some momentum and put the puck in the net. It's just a matter of how you react to it."

All things considered, they missed out on a golden opportunity to grab a 2-0 lead in this series. The Golden Knights might be considered underdogs in this best-of-seven, but it shouldn't be by much.

Any scenario that sees them continuing this incredible run into June revolves around Fleury continuing to play like the best goalie left in the playoffs. He needs to get in the minds of a Winnipeg team that is spilling over with offensive talent.

Let's call Game 2 a start.

All Laine was doing on Saturday morning was trying to downplay the edge Fleury gives his teammates. He also correctly pointed out that the Jets are a much tougher opponent for Vegas than the Kings and Sharks were when he was asked what it'll take to solve the goaltender.

"I don't know, just try to score. He's been really good in these playoffs," Laine said before Game 1. "I mean he hasn't been tested that much the games I saw. We've got to do a better job with our shots and with our scoring opportunities than L.A. and San Jose did. Just try to shoot as many pucks as we can."

That gameplan remains unchanged as they head to Vegas needing at least one victory at T-Mobile Arena to reach the Stanley Cup final.

They had enough shots to win Game 2. Fleury kept it from being so.

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Sportsnet.ca / Big heart and big skill turning Jonathan Marchessault into playoff hero

Iain MacIntyre | May 15, 2018, 12:53 AM

WINNIPEG – One thing Jonathan Marchessault has never done in hockey is run from the battle.

That he is here at all now in the National Hockey League, when there were so many opportunities for Marchessault to retreat and find less resistance and easier money elsewhere, is evidence of his determination and self-belief.

That he has been one of the best players in these Stanley Cup playoffs, and on Monday the best player on the ice as the Vegas Golden Knights beat the Winnipeg Jets 3-1, is proof that his confidence was well-founded and that a lot of people were wrong about him along the way.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

When his team lost 4-2 Saturday in Game 1 of the Western Conference Final, Marchessault promised: "Next game, no excuses. Everybody needs to come and be ready to play our best game of the playoffs. We're going to show what kind of team we are."

On Monday, Vegas did. So did Marchessault, who scored twice and had eight shots on goal as the Knights punched back against the Jets to even the series as it shifts to Las Vegas for Game 3 on Wednesday.

It was a monster game from the five-foot-nine offensive dynamo, the kind of game we should expect from a driven player who has scored everywhere he has been yet only now, after six years in professional hockey, has found in the Knights a team that believes in him as much as he always believed in himself.

"I think that's the story of our club: We were all part of... not being part of the centre of every hockey club we were on, I think," Marchessault said of the expansion Knights. "Everybody sees the opportunity here. That's what makes our success. We're just a bunch of hockey players that wanted to find a home, and we did."

The undrafted, undersized forward from Cap-Rouge, Que., finally got a full season in the NHL last year at age 26 and produced 30 goals for the Florida Panthers, his third organization. And yet the Panthers still exposed him in the expansion draft last June and let him walk to the Knights.

He had 75 points in 77 games for Vegas and with William Karlsson and Reilly Smith formed one of the best lines in hockey. They have powered the Knights' attack since October and through two games of the Conference final, despite all the hype about the Jets' firepower, have been easily the best line in the series.

In 12 playoff games, they've combined for 12 goals and 41 points.

"Biggest stage of hockey for us right now," Smith, another Florida castoff, said after setting up Marchessault's goals, both of them beauties.

"Everyone's excited. It's a big win for us. I think every professional player loves being able to step up on these stages."

Marchessault adores it. His swagger is the most noticeable of the three forwards. He's also the loudest on his line, constantly chatting and chirping on the ice. But damn, he walks the walk.

"If you're going to talk out there in the media that you have to be better, I think you need to lead by example," he said. "I tried to do that tonight."

"Definitely satisfied with our effort tonight. Every time when you get a big game for our group, we show up. And tonight, we definitely showed up. I think we showed the hockey world that we owned the right to be here and we're able to play against a great team."

After Tomas Tatar jammed a puck in at the post to make it 1-0 for Vegas at 13:23 of the first period, Marchessault beat Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck on a breakaway to double the lead at 17:22 during an 8-0 run in shots for the Knights.

Marchessault didn't even look at Reilly on the two-on-zero after his linemate poked the puck away from Kyle Connor in the neutral zone as the Jets were on a line change.

When Connor redeemed himself by banking a sharp-angle shot through Vegas goalie Marc-Andre Fleury to give the Jets some hope, down 2-1 at 7:17 of the third period, Marchessault counter-punched and easily sent Hellebuyck the wrong way to finish a two-on-one with Smith at 8:45.

Marchessault is not big, but he has a big-game aura.

Asked at the morning skate the difference in Marchessault now from the start of the season, Knights' coach Gerard Gallant said: "More competitive. First time I saw Marchy, he was a skilled guy who stayed on the outside. Didn't really battle. The reason why he's a 30-40 goal-scorer now is because he's more competitive. He'll go to those hard areas to score some goals. Small guy, but very competitive."

Big heart to go with big skill.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

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Sportsnet.ca / Brian Burke says Phil Kessel trade was product of ticket price fatigue

Josh Beneteau May 14, 2018, 8:50 PM

Brian Burke said the decision to trade for Phil Kessel was made mostly as a business decision to give Toronto Maple Leafs fans a new star player to cheer for and buy tickets to go see.

"The Phil Kessel acquisition was in large part because I thought we had some ticket price fatigue," Burke said in long-ranging interview with Bob McCown on Prime Time Sports Monday. "If we're not going to win, let's at least have a star player with what we charge for tickets."

The Maple Leafs, with Burke as GM, acquired Kessel from the Boston Bruins for two first-round picks and a second-round pick. But due to poor performances, those ended up being high picks which the Bruins used to draft star OHL players Tyler Seguin, Dougie Hamilton and Jared Knight.

As is common with the Maple Leafs, Burke was criticized heavily by fans and the media for the trade, even though Kessel scored over 30 goals in six of his eight seasons with the Leafs.

Burke was eventually let go by the Maple Leafs in January of 2013, weeks before the lockout-shortened season began. The Maple Leafs hadn't made the playoffs in Burke's five years with the team, but did the first season after he was fired.

"I have no bitterness about getting let go here," Burke said. "But that team that year was the fastest team in the NHL and the toughest team in the NHL and that team made the playoffs."

"So I said to them in the meeting when they fired me, 'why wouldn't you give me the shortened season? If I miss the playoffs you can fire me, but

this team is not going to miss the playoffs. We've finally got the formula.' But they said 'no we're going to make the change.'"

While he has no regrets about his time with the Maple Leafs, he did say the market has "an overwhelming negativity."

"The issue [in Toronto] for me ... it's a sheer volume thing," Burke said. "And when you're not successful, they all pick up a rock and they throw it."

"But I'm not making excuses, we didn't win enough games."

Burke touched on many of his career stops during his 45 minute discussion with McCown. Here are some of the other highlights from the interview.

On the most underrated trade he ever made

Burke is well-known for pulling off a trade and drafting both Sedin twins for the Vancouver Canucks in 1999. But he credits a different, but still major, draft-day trade for putting him on the map as a GM.

At the 1993 NHL draft, at the end of his time as GM of the Hartford Whalers, Burke traded winger Sergei Marakov, and picks No. 6, 45 and 53 in the draft for pick No. 2 which he then used to select future Hall-of-Famer Chris Pronger.

Burke then joined the NHL head office before the 1993-94 season and served as executive vice president and director of hockey operations for five years.

"So when I went back on the job market after five years with the league, I had a little bit of a track record to show because by then [Pronger] was a star," he said.

On working with Gary Bettman in the NHL head office

Burke says Gary Bettman gave him his most important education when the two worked together in the league office.

"When you work for Gary Bettman, it's like getting an MBA from Harvard Business School," Burke said. "He's brilliant."

But Burke left the NHL after five years to become general manager of the Canucks in 1998. While he said he enjoyed his time with the league, he left because wanted to have a rooting interest again.

"I said to [Bettman] that I can't stand going to games and not caring who wins. That was the worst part of the job," Burke said. "I said I've got to get back to a team. I have to get somewhere where the losses and wins are important."

Sportsnet's newest podcast is a weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world. New episodes every Thursday.

On being coached by Lou Lamoriello at Providence College

Before going to Harvard Law School, Burke played four years at Providence College where he was coached by Lou Lamoriello.

As hockey fans would probably expect, Lamoriello was a tough customer behind the bench back then, but Burke credits that drive for Lamoriello's success in the NHL.

"I think the one thing that was obvious, even when I met him that fall in 1973, was that this was a serious guy that spent all his time preparing for whatever was in front of him," Burke said of Lamoriello. "He would not accept losing. He's a guy who just knows how to get to someplace then works his tail off to get there."

Burke told a story about missing a practice on Christmas Day because Ron Wilson, a teammate at Providence who would later coach the Maple Leafs under Burke, unplugged his alarm as a prank. Lamoriello was obviously not impressed.

"Some prank," Burke said. "I had to skate at four in the morning for nine straight days for being late."

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

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Sportsnet.ca / Five stages of the Vegas Golden Knights' unfathomable first season

Rory Boylen | May 14, 2018, 4:49 PM

The Vegas Golden Knights were poked fun at for dropping "Las" from their name, and sticking with a two-word nickname that the U.S. Army formally opposed in trademark applications. The name and logo unveiling came with a technological glitch and overall wasn't as crisp as the team's in-game presentations turned out to be. And the new colour scheme, before the jerseys were unveiled, seemed incompatible.

Yet the Golden Knights turned into easily the best story of the NHL season.

Here is how their first year unfolded, in five stages.

## BAD EXPANSION DRAFT

In the beginning, the Vegas Golden Knights weren't getting good reviews for their work in the expansion draft.

With rules that undoubtedly set up this expansion team better than others that came before it, the Golden Knights had plenty of options and avenues they could have taken. For instance, the thinking went, they could have gone all-in on trying to be competitive and make the playoffs right out of the gate. This would have come at the expense of making other trades to acquire draft picks and prospects, which would probably send them to the bottom of the standings shortly after.

Another line of thinking had Vegas taking calculated risks on players like Charles Hudon, low entry draft picks who had shown well in the AHL, but nothing close to an NHL breakout yet. These players would form the back bone of what was believed had to be a weak forward group — and if they ended up hitting, it would push Vegas further along.

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The majority certainly believed that Vegas absolutely had to build this thing through the entry draft, rather than rush it with the expansion draft. The crux of Vegas' plans had to be to accumulate assets, either to flip in trade or in the form of futures to hang on to.

And Vegas did go big on the entry draft, coming out of the expansion process with three first-rounders in 2017 and loading up on seconds and thirds for years. But still the conclusion was McPhee missed out on some opportunities to make his roster better out of the gate, or to at least scoop up other players with more trade value. For instance, Petr Mrazek was passed over to be a back up one year removed from a stellar season. They took Deryk Engelland from Calgary one week before he was able to test the UFA market and passed over a veteran like Matt Stajan, or one of those shot-in-the-dark youngsters like Brett Kulak. There were a few examples along these lines.

Most thought McPhee could have gotten more bang out of the expansion draft process. There were extremely few anywhere in the hockey community who viewed McPhee's expansion draft as a success. The overarching belief was that the Golden Knights were losers in their own draft.

Stop with the revisionist history on Vegas. Nearly everyone thought they were going to be very bad and absolutely everyone thought they

blew their expansion draft (I still think they did). Take the damn L. It's ok to be wrong once in a while.

— Ian Fleming (@imfleming16) May 7, 2018

Owner Bill Foley certainly didn't see this year's success coming. He said a lot of people called him crazy for his initial timeline of success for the Golden Knights: playoffs in three years, Stanley Cup in six.

"We don't have high expectations for this year," Foley told ESPN.com back in August. "We're going to be competitive. If we're going to lose a game, we'd like to lose by a goal or two, not lose by five or six. We don't want to be a walkover team. We want to be competitive, we want to be entertaining on the ice, we want to score some goals.

"We have some really good players, but we're not deep like a lot of teams are in terms of four lines of forwards and two or three lines of defencemen. But we got some really good players in the expansion draft. So we just need to do well for a couple years, then make the playoffs in three years as we start transitioning in some of these younger guys — like Shea Theodore and Alex Tuch and Jake Bischoff. We'll be pretty good in three years and we'll make a run in five or six."

McPhee was interviewed by Bob McCown and Damien Cox on Prime Time Sports after the entry draft had concluded, where the Golden Knights nabbed Cody Glass sixth, Nick Suzuki 13th and Erik Brannstrom 15th. Nic Hague and Jake Leschyshyn went to Vegas in the second round. McPhee talked about needing impact players and game breakers and how important it is to find those types through the draft, which is where he hoped Vegas could start making up ground on the rest of the NHL.

"Time will tell whether we can pull that off through the draft. We tried to accumulate a lot of picks to be able to hit on a lot of those," the GM said. "We'll do our best to do it through the draft. If there's another way to do it at some point we'll have to try that as well. Because as we all know those guys are the real difference makers and if you can get those guys in the right positions you can win."

Vegas did, of course, pick up some impact players in the expansion draft. Jonathan Marchessault, David Perron and James Neal all qualified as such, but each were heading into the last year of their contracts before becoming UFA eligible. Far from being viewed as impact players for Vegas conventional wisdom had them being used as trade bait for the Golden Knights to acquire more draft picks and prospects.

"The players Vegas drafts, not all of them are going to play for Vegas. It's not so much an expansion draft for them as it is an accumulation of assets," Calgary Flames GM Brad Treliving said at the time. He, like many, saw Vegas' draft as an opportunity to better their own lot. "How can we get a player through Vegas? How do we capitalize on an opportunity here?"

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

## MAYBE THEY'RE OK BUT THEY SHOULD STILL TRADE PLAYERS OUT, RIGHT?

As we know, Vegas sent shockwaves through the NHL with their fast start when they were almost unbeatable at home. At Christmas the Golden Knights were 23-9-2 and stood as the best team in the Western Conference and second best overall.

After nearly three months of this talk was beginning to turn to trade deadline strategy. Surely this flash-in-the-pan success couldn't change the inevitable, that Vegas was to trade its expiring contracts and players of interest to playoff-bound teams willing to give up futures for a shot in the arm, right?

"I don't think this really changes any of it," Misha Donskov, Vegas' director of hockey operations, said on Sportsnet's Tape to Tape Podcast in December. "When you look back at our expansion draft and the process and strategy that we had going into expansion, we wanted to



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

acquire the best players, the best assets in the short-term and long-term. We wanted to be competitive right away. ... We wanted to do our best to win hockey games.

"We're having some early success now. That doesn't change our mindset and how we're going to look to the future. We still know what the importance is in young players, we know what the importance is in picks and we know how key that is to ultimately having long-term success for the franchise.

"We'll let this play out here until after Christmas and see where we are, but we're not going to do anything major at this point based on the success we're having and the strategy that we have in place for the long-term success of our team."

Despite all their early success, the vast majority was still expecting a down turn at some point. All the wins in the first three months made it evermore likely the Golden Knights would claim the title of best expansion team ever eventually, but it was still hard to imagine them standing pat or buying at the deadline and then reaching the post-season.

But the owner was singing a bit of a different, more immediately optimistic tune.

"Every game that we win makes me a little more impatient, I have to say," Foley said in late-December. "I had a timeline of playoffs in three and Stanley Cup in six. I felt like that was very achievable. I felt like we put ourselves in a position to do that with the draft and the draft for the coming years. I have to say I think I moved up our timeline a little bit because we are doing so well. The guys on the ice are gelling so well together.

"Now we have a situation where we need to get some unrestricted free agents signed up to make sure we keep the core of this team in place."

Vegas returned from the Christmas break to win its first four in a row and six of seven. Then on Jan. 3 they re-signed one of their big pending UFAs, locking in Jonathan Marchessault for six years and a \$5-million cap hit. It was the first turn towards trying to make the playoffs right away and step away from selling off at the deadline.

"We're first place in the Western Conference, we're an expansion team," Vegas reporter Gary Lawless said. "It's blow-your-mind shocking.

"The prevailing question prior to the season was 'how bad is Vegas going to be?' And now all of a sudden the question is 'how far can they go?' It's been a dramatic change in fortunes."

It was still hard to believe that what Vegas was doing was sustainable even for the rest of the season.

"The first half means nothing if you don't pick it up in the second half and you don't go to the ultimate goal," Vegas coach Gerard Gallant said in January. "Keep working hard, playing hard, and get as many points as we can, and we'll see where it takes us."

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## THE DEADLINE COMES AND VEGAS ARE ... BUYERS

On Feb. 1 the Vegas Golden Knights won their 34th game — against the Winnipeg Jets — to set a new wins record for a team in its inaugural season.

While Marchessault was now under contract, Perron and Neal still were not. On the day of the trade deadline the Golden Knights were 41-16-4 and still the best team in the Western Conference, one point shy of the league-leading Tampa Bay Lightning. The deadline presented McPhee with some unprecedented questions, but we maybe shouldn't have been surprised by how he reacted, given what he said about the situation at the end of November.

"We do have a master plan, but if this team is in the hunt way down the road, way down the road, in March, then we'll stay in the hunt. I wouldn't derail it. It's not fair to this team or this community."

The Golden Knights ended up being buyers at the deadline, acquiring Tomas Tatar from Detroit for their first-rounder in 2018 and two other picks in 2019 and 2020. Like his expansion draft results, McPhee's trade was mostly met with skepticism and maybe this time we were right. Tatar, 27, had just six points in 20 regular season games and is scoreless in four post-season games while making \$5.3 million against the cap through 2021.

But the Golden Knights could have gone even bigger than that. As trade deadline day rumours swirled, Vegas was linked constantly to Erik Karlsson.

## CONGRATULATIONS ON MAKING THE PLAYOFFS, BUT YOUR LUCK RUNS OUT HERE

Even after winning the Pacific, finishing third in the West and fifth overall, no one was picking the Golden Knights to win the Stanley Cup. Heck, they were a popular upset pick in Round 1 against the Los Angeles Kings — who, of course, they swept.

"People said we were going to lose in the first round, the second round and now they're saying we're definitely going to lose this round," Luca Sbisa said this week. But we don't listen to those outsiders. It's been a fun trip. [We are] misfits that no one really wanted or people gave up on. And look where we are now."

Four wins away from reaching the Stanley Cup Final.

## YEAR 1 WAS AN UNABASHED SUCCESS, SO WHAT'S NEXT?

Vegas has roughly \$25 million in projected cap space this summer with a number of players to re-sign or let go. UFAs Perron and Neal are still the most impactful players without a contract. Sbisa and Clayton Stoner are also UFAs likely to leave, as is Jason Garrison.

Breakout star William Karlsson is the leading RFA, which should be a fascinating negotiation given how due for regression he seems to be. Theodore, averaging 22:26 of ice time per night in the playoffs, is also an RFA and could be the one with the most lasting impact on this roster in the years to come.

William Karlsson is an RFA at the end of the year.

'14-15: 21 GP, 3G, 5P

'15-16: 81 GP, 9G, 20P

'16-17: 81 GP, 6G, 25P

'17-18: 66 GP, 35G, 59P (+36)

How do you handle this situation if you're VGK?

— JB (@JB\_HockeyTalk) March 7, 2018

But at the core, Vegas should return just as capable of competing as this season. Marc-Andre Fleury is signed for another season. The top line figures to be intact. And, especially after such a successful inaugural season, the city of Vegas could very well be an attractive destination for star free agents (John Tavares?) or a trade partner willing and able to make a splash (revisit Karlsson talks, or enter Drew Doughty discussions?).

And as for their three first-round picks from last summer: Glass scored 102 points in 64 WHL games, Nick Suzuki hit 100 in 64 OHL games and defenceman Brannstrom scored 15 points in 44 Swedish League games. Glass, especially, could possibly make Vegas' lineup next season.

Can they replicate their Year 1 success and win another division title?

No one is betting against Vegas anymore.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

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Sportsnet.ca / Ovechkin, Capitals playing free with Round 2 woes in the past

Kristina Rutherford | May 14, 2018, 3:53 PM

TAMPA, Fla. — Alex Ovechkin is at long last playing on this stage, and the fact there's something a little different about No. 8 on this particular playoff run is no doubt a direct result of how far the Washington Capitals have finally come.

"If we're being serious here," says veteran defender Matt Niskanen, one day after the Capitals took a 2-0 lead in this best-of-seven against Tampa Bay, "I think getting past that second round is a relief for him.

"I think beating Pittsburgh was a huge deal for him. We earned that. That's a good feeling for all of us."

Of course it is. These Capitals are here in the Eastern Conference Final for the first time in two decades. It's a first for Ovechkin and (an injured) Nicklas Backstrom and Braden Holtby and Evgeny Kuznetsov and T.J. Oshie and... the list goes on. It's a first for a bunch of players who, for the two seasons before this, had the best record in the NHL, only to flame out in Round 2, at the hands of Sidney Crosby and the Penguins who went on to win the last two Stanley Cups.

Nobody still with a shot at the Cup this post-season, as of Monday afternoon, has registered more than Ovechkin's 19 points (tied Kuznetsov, his linemate). Ovechkin scored his series-leading 10th goal in Sunday's 6-2 thrashing in Tampa, on a never-did-you-doubt-it finish on a 2-on-1, after a nice backhand saucer pass from Kuznetsov. They honestly made it look easy.

Just ask Lightning head coach Jon Cooper what it's like to play against Ovechkin at this stage in the playoffs.

"Oh, well," Cooper says. "How do I say this? How many years has he been in the league?"

It's 13.

"Fourteen years," Cooper continues (close enough). "I think he's taking 14 years of frustration out in one playoff round – not round, series. You know what I'm talking about.

"His whole playoff season, he's taking it out on that. There's a reason he has 600 goals and he's done all these wonderful things in the league. In the past, he's not had playoff success, and when you do get to taste a little bit of it, it really tastes good."

Though these aren't the best numbers Ovechkin has produced in a post-season — in 2008-09, he had 21 points through 14 games, compared to 19 through as many games this time — there's certainly a difference in how he's feeling, and his buy-in at both ends of the ice.

"He's having fun," Capitals head coach Barry Trotz says. "He's producing. He's all in. We asked our group to, if you're going to have success, you have to have all-in contribution, and he has. I think he's enjoying the run, the playoffs, maybe for the first time in a long time.

"He's the face of the franchise, and as I said, as the face of the franchise you get a lot of the credit and you also get a lot of the blame. Because of that I think at times it's taken some of the joy out of it too."

What he and the Capitals are certainly doing is taking the joy out of it for a Tampa Bay team that came into this series as the favourite, with 54 regular-season wins compared to Washington's 49.

And if the Lightning are going to register Win 1 of this series, which has to come on the road, they'll have to slow down No. 8, who had four shots and two points in Game 2, and is averaging a pair of points per game in Round 3.

"The one thing about Ovi is, you can't allow him to have the puck in situations where he can shoot it clean," Cooper says. "[Game 2] is the perfect example. If you just give him a 2-on-1, and if you're going to give a guy of his talent that much time and space to put a puck in the net, he's going to do it.

"Some of those — Game 1, that shot he takes, like that's on his tape. And when he does that that, we've got to block those shots, and we're just not doing that, and we've got to do a better job."

The Lightning will get the chance on Tuesday night, as this series shifts back to the capital. When Ovechkin thought about heading back home for a conference final, after that win Sunday night, a broad smile crossed his face.

There's no question he's having more fun and feeling lighter this time around, even if his teammates haven't actually asked him if that's the case.

"He hasn't talked about it," Niskanen admits. "I'm just guessing here, knowing him. He's a competitive guy, and he's taken some past failures pretty hard and he's not going to let this opportunity go to waste.

"He's bringing it, so good for him. He's leading the way."

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Sportsnet.ca / Down Goes Brown Weekend Wrap: Jets, Capitals on collision course?

Sean McIndoe May 14, 2018, 10:34 AM

Every Monday, Sean McIndoe looks back at weekend play in the NHL and the league's biggest storylines. You can follow him on Twitter.

Opening faceoff: Jets take off early

It's one game. The first game doesn't necessarily tell us much about how a series will play out — remember the Bruins thumping the Lightning in their second-round opener? — and there's a good chance that this one still has a long way to go, with plenty of twists and turns baked in.

But even with all the obvious caveats in place, things couldn't have gone much better for the Jets on Saturday night. They won the game, which is obviously the important part. But not all wins are created equal. Sometimes you steal a game, or barely hang on, or win even though you didn't put together a 60-minute effort. Sometimes you win games you probably deserved to lose.

And sometimes, you show up and are clearly the better team from start to finish. That's the sort of game the Jets put together on Saturday, scoring on their first shot and pumping three goals past Marc-Andre Fleury before the game was eight minutes old. The Golden Knights regained their footing from there to keep the game respectable, but that's all they did, as the Jets largely shut them down the rest of the way. Despite playing from well behind for almost the entire game, the high-flying Knights managed just 21 shots and never seemed to be taking the game to their opponents.

Again, it's one game, and maybe we got the result we should have expected — with the Jets coming off the high of a Game 7 win in Nashville and the Knights seeing their first action in nearly a week, some early



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

Vegas rust may have been inevitable. If the series goes long, that discrepancy in time off may yet come back to hurt the Jets.

But that's if the series does go long; it didn't look like it would on Saturday. And while Fleury was brilliant against the Kings and still leads the league in post-season save percentage and goals-against average, it's fair to point out that he's now given up three goals or more in five of his last six games. With Connor Hellebuyck looking sharp lately, that's not a good sign for the Knights.

We're still in uncharted territory with this Vegas team, which now trails a series for the first time. Maybe they rebound with a better effort tonight and take the series back home tied at one. But the early returns are in, and they're clear: The Jets were the better team through one game. Now we find out how many more they need.

### Road to the Cup

The five teams that look like they're headed towards a Stanley Cup.

5. Your team: That's right. With only four teams left in the playoffs and a suddenly unwieldy five-team power ranking format to work with, we can confirm that your personal favourite team is holding down the fifth spot. Congratulations, and never let it be said that we don't give credit where it's deserved.

4. Tampa Bay Lightning: Nikita Kucherov hasn't done much in the conference finals so far. But he did find a creative way to make last night's highlight reel: by kicking Brett Connolly.

3. Vegas Golden Knights: We knew their success was already getting attention from outside of the hockey world. But here's a new audience we may not have counted on: professional gamblers.

2. Washington Capitals: Last night's win was the Caps' seventh in eight playoff road games.

1. Winnipeg Jets: Opponents agree: Dustin Byfuglien is very strong. But apparently not the strongest.

Stop me if you've heard this one before, but Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals are looking unstoppable on their way towards the Stanley Cup final.

Oh, right. This is kind of a new thing for Washington. And it's confusing people.

Still, the Capitals rolled over the Lightning to take a pair of road wins, and now head home with a 2-0 lead. They opened the series by storming out to a four-goal lead on Friday night before closing out a 4-2 win. They had a tougher time through the first half of last night's game, before stunning the Tampa crowd with a pair of late goals in the second. Ovechkin and Brett Connolly added insurance goals in the third on the way to a 6-2 final.

The Lightning aren't done yet; they're way too good to write off after two games. And yes, a two-game lead never feels all that secure when we're talking about the Capitals. But at the risk of sounding ridiculous within a few days, it really does feel different this time in Washington. Maybe beating the Penguins was the sort of franchise-transforming moment that vaporizes all the old narratives. Or maybe this team was always a bounce or two away, and now they're finally getting them.

Either way, the Caps are dominating in a way that virtually nobody saw coming. Even those of us who picked the Capitals to win the series weren't expecting it to look this easy. The Lightning have pushed back as best they could, and last night's game took on a nasty edge as it went on. But none of this has been about compete levels or heart or wanting it more. The Capitals just look better.

Washington fans will no doubt remember the first round, when the Blue Jackets took a 2-0 lead only to cough it up. But even that counter-example seems to strengthen the Caps' case, since the team made the questionable decision to start that series with 2016 Vezina winner

Brayden Holtby on the bench. Since switching back to their actual starter, they've won 10 of 12.

Maybe they should go back to Philipp Grubauer against the Lightning, just to make things interesting. It's fair to say that's unlikely. If anything, the next lineup change the Capitals make could be the return of Nicklas Backstrom, who remains out with a hand injury but could be back at some point. If so, it would be yet another thing going right for the Washington Capitals during a playoff run. As strange as that still sounds.

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### The bottom five

Five stories from around the league that aren't going so well.

5. Kyle Dubas: The new Leafs' GM has been on the job for 72 hours now and still hasn't traded for a single Norris Trophy winner. Hey, you millennial punk — less avocado toast, more Drew Doughty.

OK, that's probably harsh. Dubas hasn't done anything wrong since he was introduced on Friday. But this is the Bottom Five section, so we have to come up with ways to be negative even when it isn't warranted. Luckily for Dubas, nobody else in the media ever does that so he should be fine.

What we don't know yet is who he'll be working with. There are reports that Lou Lamoriello is talking to the Islanders, and it's sounding increasingly unlikely that Mark Hunter will stick around. Elliotte Friedman reported that Ron Francis could be added to the Leafs' front office, depending on how things play out.

So we've got a situation that's in flux, and a new GM who'll be met with the sort of skepticism you tend to get in Toronto when you don't have 25 years of experience and multiple Cup rings. Win or lose, the Leafs have been an entertaining team to watch on the ice in recent years. This off-season might be shaping up to be more of the same in the front office.

4. Celebrity fan loyalty: The NHL doesn't typically attract a ton of interest from A-list celebrities, as evidenced by the slim pickings available to the league at their annual awards show. But every now and then, a familiar face pledges their undying love to a team.

But as every checkout-aisle tabloid reminds us, love is fleeting in the celebrity world. That applies to hockey, too, as the weekend saw a pair of stars openly swapping bandwagons. That included actor Wil Wheaton, a diehard Kings fan who's been vocal about his support for the team through a pair of Stanley Cup wins. But today, he's apparently a Jets fan — albeit one who wears a Nordiques jersey for reasons we're not quite clear on.

That seems weird, but you can cut Wheaton some slack. The Jets are playing the Knights, who knocked out his Kings in the first round, and no true hockey fan is every above a little post-season grudge-holding. Besides, he only roots for the Kings — it's not like he's married to them.

Which brings us to Carrie Underwood. She's been a loyal Predators fan for years, some of which probably has to do with husband Mike Fisher playing for them. But with both Fisher and the Preds now done, Underwood is also hopping bandwagons. She's a Golden Knights fan now.

And I'll also say, until next season, I am officially a @GoldenKnights fan! I'll enjoy seeing them make a little history!!

— Carrie Underwood (@carrieunderwood) May 11, 2018

I swear, if Jon Hamm shows up at the awards wearing a Dave Manson Blackhawks jersey, I'm going to start wondering about these folks.

3. The Rangers' coaching search: After we came within hours of making it all the way through the season without a single coaching change, the Rangers were the first team to find themselves with a vacancy after firing Alain Vigneault on April 7. They were quickly joined by the Stars, Hurricanes and Flames. But one month later, those teams have all found



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

new coaches while the Rangers are back to being the only team without one.

It sure sounds like they had their guy in University of Denver coach Jim Montgomery. But he chose to take the Dallas job instead, and his explanation as to why has raised a few eyebrows among Rangers fans.

The team is now reportedly waiting on assistants who are still active in the playoffs, although it sounds like Boston University's David Quinn is still in the running despite some question as to whether he wants the job. The good news for the Rangers is that they can afford to be patient – with no more competition for candidates out there, they're back to being the only game in town.

2. Andrei Vasilevskiy: We're concerned, right? It feels like we should be concerned. We just saw one Vezina finalist melt down, with Pekka Rinne's Game 7 disaster spelling the end of the Predators' season. Now Vasilevskiy seems to be following suit, coughing up 10 goals in five periods against the Capitals.

Not all of those goals have been his fault, with the Capitals making some fantastic cross-ice plays to leave him with little chance. But still, a guy who spent much of the season making highlight-reel miracle saves suddenly seems to have sprung a leak. We won't rule him out yet, because goaltending is voodoo and he'll probably have a 45-save shutout next game. But if he can't manage that sort of instant turnaround, the Lightning may be done.

1. Careful what you wish for: It didn't end up deciding the game, but one of last night's key moments came in the first period, when T.J. Oshie was whistled for a high-stick on Victor Hedman. The Lightning scored on the ensuing power play to take their first lead of the game.

One problem: Oshie's stick didn't actually catch Hedman — it was the puck.

It's always frustrating to see a blown call in a key game, especially if it results in a power-play goal. But the puck had barely been fished out of the Capitals' net before you could hear hockey fans mumbling in unison: Hey, shouldn't we have replay review for high sticks?

No. No, we should not. If the last few seasons has taught us anything, it's that whatever problem you think the league has, more replay review is not the answer.

Would some sort of challenge system or other review have prevented the blown Oshie call? Maybe. But it would also introduce more delays, nitpicking and who knows how many other unintended consequences. Sure, it seems like reviews for plays like Oshie's would be rare and wouldn't take long. We thought the same for goalie interference and offside reviews, and look where that got us.

Sometimes calls get missed. It happens. But at some point, you can't stop and review everything. "Just get it right" is a nice concept, but we've been down this road enough over the last few years.

Livestream every single game of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs—blackout free—plus the Toronto Blue Jays, key Raptors & NBA Playoffs matchups and the 100th Mastercard Memorial Cup, all in one subscription.

Quick shifts: 10 more notable moments from around the league

- The hockey world lost a legend over the weekend, as Hockey Hall of Fame coach Clare Drake died at the age of 89. Drake was inducted to the HHOF as a builder as part of last year's class.

- Loved this quote from Kucherov on the value of playing entertaining hockey. But condolences to him on the demise of his future coaching career.

Nikita Kucherov certainly has the big picture in mind. Read what he had to say about the Lightning and what they need to do in Game 2 tomorrow: [pic.twitter.com/wz10SepY5P](https://pic.twitter.com/wz10SepY5P)

— Dan Rosen (@drosennh) May 12, 2018

- Team Canada had a rough weekend at the World Championships, taking a 5–1 loss against Finland. Aaron Ekblad accused the Finns of being "cowardly" for what he saw as frequent diving.

- More tough World Championships news for Canadian fans, or at least those in Vancouver. Blue chip prospect Elias Pettersson is out of the tournament with a broken thumb.

- Tobias Enstrom took a big hit on Saturday and left the game, sparking fears of another concussion. He did return.

- Mike Fisher made it official on Saturday, announcing his retirement for a second time after his late-season comeback with the Predators.

- The 2018 Memorial Cup is set, with the Swift Current Broncos, Hamilton Bulldogs and Acadie-Bathurst Titan punching their tickets over the weekend. They'll join the host Regina Pats in the four-team tournament, which begins on Friday.

- Things got a little silly before an ECHL playoff game last night:

- Mark Scheifele may not possess Buff-strength, but he has joined some impressive company with his post-season so far:

- Finally, here's a long read on young Capitals center (and Penguin-slayer) Evgeni Kuznetsov's rise to stardom.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Marchessault makes the difference

Scott Cullen

Marchessault and Fleury lead Vegas to a crucial Game Two victory at Winnipeg, evening the series; Smith, Laine and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

## HEROES

Jonathan Marchessault – Vegas' star winger was a force in Two, scoring a pair goals on 11 shot attempts (8 SOG). He has 15 points (6 G, 9 A) in 12 playoff games and, in the playoffs, Vegas has outscored the opposition 11-2 during 5-on-5 play with Marchessault on the ice.

Marc-Andre Fleury – The Golden Knights netminder stopped 30 of 31 shots in a 3-1 Game Two victory at Winnipeg. He has a .945 save percentage in a dozen playoff starts.

Reilly Smith – The Golden Knights winger earned two assists in a 3-1 Game Two victory at Winnipeg. He has 14 points (1 G, 13 A) in 12 playoff games.

## ZEROES

Nikolaj Ehlers – Winnipeg's speedy winger struggled (6 for, 17 against, 26.1 CF%, 1-12 scoring chances) in Game Two against Vegas.

Dustin Byfuglien and Josh Morrissey – The Jets blueliners were both on the ice for two goals against in a 3-1 Game Two victory at Winnipeg.

James Neal, Erik Haula and Alex Tuch – The Vegas trio had a hard game (6 for, 16 against, 27.3 CF%, 4-5 scoring chances) in a Game Two victory at Winnipeg.

## STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Patrik Laine – The Jets sniper led the team with seven shot attempts and four shots on goal, yet also had team-worst possession stats (10 for, 16



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

against, 38.5 CF%, 3-11 scoring chances) in a Game Two loss to Winnipeg.

### VITAL SIGNS

Tomas Tatar – Back in the Vegas lineup after being a healthy scratch for several games, the Golden Knights winger scored the first goal of Game Two. It was his first point in five postseason contests.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Eller leads Capitals to Game Two win

Scott Cullen

The Washington Capitals stunned the Tampa Bay Lightning to take a 2-0 series lead; Eller, Kuznetsov, Ovechkin and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

### HEROES

Lars Eller – The Capitals centre scored a goal and added two helpers in a 6-2 Game Two win at Tampa Bay. He had nine points (3 G, 6 A) in the past seven games, and has taken on more responsibility in the past three games while Nicklas Backstrom has been out due to a hand injury.

Evgeny Kuznetsov – Washington's playmaking pivot also had a goal and two assists in Game Two at Tampa Bay; he has 19 points (8 G, 11 A) in 14 playoff games.

Alex Ovechkin – The Capitals superstar sniper scored once and added an assist in Game Two at Tampa Bay, giving him 19 points (10 G, 9 A) in 14 playoff games.

### ZEROES

Ryan McDonagh and Anton Stralman – The Lightning blueliners struggled when they were together (8 for, 11 against, 42.1 CF%, 4-8 scoring chances) and both ended up on the ice for three goals against in a 6-2 Game Two loss to Washington.

Andrei Vasilevskiy – Tampa Bay's netminder allowed six goals on 37 shots in Game Two, leaving him with a .839 save percentage through the first two games of the series against the Capitals.

### STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Steven Stamkos – The Lightning star centre had team-worst possession stats (6 for, 13 against, 31.6 CF%, 2-8 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 6-2 Game Two loss to Washington, but he also recorded a goal and an assist on the power play.

### VITAL SIGNS

Nicklas Backstrom – For the third straight game, the Capitals were without their stellar two-way centre and, against the odds, Washington has won all three games.

### SHORT SHIFTS

Capitals RW Tom Wilson contributed a goal and an assist in a 6-2 Game Two win at Tampa Bay and has six points (1 G, 5 A) in his past five games...Capitals D John Carlson added two assists and has 14 points (3 G, 11 A) in 14 games...Lightning C Brayden Point chipped in a goal and an assist in the 6-2 loss to Washington, giving him 12 points (5 G, 7 A) in 12 playoff games...Capitals G Braden Holtby made 33 saves on 35 shots in Game Two at Tampa Bay; he has a .926 save percentage in 14 playoff games.

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TSN.CA / Jets fail to adjust to Preds-style slow down from Vegas

Frank Seravalli

WINNIPEG — The Vegas Golden Knights vowed to bounce back and Paul Maurice and the Jets knew it was coming.

Maurice predicted almost verbatim how Monday's Game 2 would play out. He would be a wealthier man if he went to, well, Vegas to play his hunch like Pete Rose.

"I think it's going to be a really, really tight game," Maurice said. "I don't think there's going to be as much offence going both ways. It will be a more physical game and will be more contested in the 10-foot area [around the net]. [Game 1] got into a track meet at times. I don't think you're going to see that tonight."

Yet, prepare as they may, there was little magic the Jets had up their sleeve to solve it.

They spent a good majority of the night with the puck in Marc-Andre Fleury's end, but ended up with little to show for it. Kyle Connor's third-period power play goal was all that kept the Jets from essentially being shut out for the ninth period of their last 12 at Bell MTS Place.

"We've just come through I would think the hardest forechecking team in the National Hockey League, so we should be accustomed to that and be able to handle it well," Maurice said post-game.

They didn't handle it well. They didn't adjust.

Now the pesky Golden Knights, foolishly written off by some after the first game of the Western Conference Final, are alive and kicking after mimicking what the Nashville Predators did last round to slow down the Jets.

The Golden Knights walked out of Winnipeg with a gutty 3-1 win in Game 2 to earn a split on the road. The all-square best-of-seven series shifts to Sin City for Game 3 on Wednesday night, where Vegas now owns home-ice advantage.

The Golden Knights' only loss at T-Mobile Arena (4-1) this spring was in double overtime to the San Jose Sharks.

Vegassssss, baby.

Did anyone really think the best expansion team in the history of pro sports would go quietly?

"We're not too worried about what other people have to say," James Neal said.

The lesson is, continue to bet against the Knights at your own peril.

"I think we showed the hockey world that we earned the right to be here and we're able to play against a great team," Vegas forward Jonathan Marchessault said. "Every time when you get a big game of our group, we show up, and tonight we definitely showed up."

Marchessault was the one immediately after Game 1 who called Monday night a "must-win" and said we would find out what the Golden Knights are made of.

In return, we found out what Marchessault is made of, with his two-goal performance – including a back-breaking insurance goal 1:28 after Connor finally breathed life into Bell MTS Place – walking the walk.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

"If you're going to talk out there in the media that you have to be better, I think you need to lead by example, and I tried to do that tonight," Marchessault said.

To that same end, if the Jets are going to predict the outcome, then they should be better prepared to push back against it. Vegas deserves credit for their adjustment, again a nod to the edge in skill that the Jets own. But it can't always be, as it has in the last three losses, that the opposition clogged up the neutral zone and the Jets had no answer.

That isn't a recipe for success.

"There's a 10-minute block [of video] there that we're not going to like very much tomorrow," Maurice said. "The one that cost us I think is that we pushed too early, got out of our routes too early."

The stat sheet says the Jets held a significant advantage in high-danger scoring chances (16-9), according to NaturalStatTrick.com, but few of them seemed to generate second-chance opportunities because the Knights essentially set up a shield around Fleury. Many were one and done.

Still, that overall idea of puck possession is what left Jets captain Blake Wheeler feeling upbeat.

"There was about 57 minutes of that game that were good for us," Wheeler said. "Three minutes of it got away from us. They could have scored four goals in three minutes ... They're going to create some momentum and put the puck in the net. It's just a matter of how you react to it."

The Jets have reacted well all season. They haven't dropped consecutive games since early March. But their Stanley Cup aspirations may be determined by how they react to this latest blow.

The winner of Game 3 in a tied conference final has advanced to the Stanley Cup Final nearly 82 per cent of the time (35-8) in NHL history.

We've got ourselves a series now.

"It's a series," Jets defenceman Jacob Trouba said. "I don't think anybody is panicking. We've been here before. It's a long series."

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TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Vancouver Canucks

Scott Cullen

The Vancouver Canucks have missed the playoffs in four of the past five seasons, finishing with a sub-.500 points percentage in each of the past three seasons.

Off-Season Game Plan looks at a Canucks team that no longer has the Sedins and while it has some better days on the horizon, but it will take some time to get there.

Henrik Sedin and Daniel Sedin have been fixtures on the roster since 2000-2001, and there were elite performers in the peak years of their careers. Even with their careers winding down, and ice time diminishing, they have remained among Vancouver's more effective players, so it's not as though losing them will suddenly make the team better, but it also means that \$14-million will be coming off the salary cap, and that opens up some opportunities.

Jim Benning has been the general manager for the past four seasons, so he has to own some of these struggles, and yet the franchise gave him a contract extension, presumably sold on his ability to build what is now a

quality group of prospects in the system. How Benning handles his prospects and how he spends in free agency is going to have a long-term impact on this team, so if it doesn't go right, the rebuilding plan is going to be an extended process. Such is the nature of a rebuilding team that it could still be a long process even if the Canucks make the right moves.

But, there is hope. Brock Boeser was one of the league's top rookies before getting hurt. Last year's fifth overall pick, Elias Pettersson was the MVP of the Swedish Hockey League. Goaltender Thatcher Demko had a strong season in the American Hockey League and centre Adam Gaudette won the Hobey Baker Award as the top player in U.S. College hockey, so there are reasons for the Canucks to be positive about the future, but the challenge remains to secure more high-end talent, especially on defence, as this group moves forward.

### HEROES

**Brock Boeser** – The 23rd pick in the 2015 Draft made an immediate impact in his first full season, scoring 29 goals in 62 games before suffering a back injury that ended his season prematurely. For a team without a ton of bright spots, having one of the top rookie scorers is a major positive.

**Daniel Sedin** – As the twins played their final NHL season, Daniel finished with another solid season, scoring 23 goals and 55 points, with positive shot differentials (52.5 CF%, +6.3 CFRel%), even though his ice time (15:16 per game) was his lowest since 2003-2004.

**Derrick Pouliot** – Unable to consistently crack the Penguins lineup, the 24-year-old blueliner got a better opportunity in Vancouver and performed admirably, recording 22 points and posting favourable possession numbers (50.3 CF%, +3.4 CFRel%).

### ZEROES

**Erik Gudbranson** – Injuries have limited the 6-foot-5 defenceman to 82 games in two seasons with the Canucks, but even when healthy, he continued to struggle in terms of shot differentials. He was bailed out, to some degree, by a high on-ice save percentage (.938), but his track record, and a look at shots against, doesn't suggest that's a sustainable feature of his game.

**Michael Del Zotto** – While he logged more than 20 minutes per game, while playing all 82 games, it was a difficult season for the veteran defenceman. He was on the wrong side of puck possession and the quality of shots against was significant.

**Markus Granlund** – It's not as though the 25-year-old should have been expected to duplicate his breakthrough 19-goal 2016-2017 season, but regression came as expected. His shooting percentage dropped from 15.6% to 8.6% and Granlund finished with just eight goals and 12 points in 53 games.

Brock Boeser	62	29	26	55	48.0
	0.5	101.3	61.6	17:30	\$925K
Bo Horvat	64	22	22	44	48.8
	102.1	48.4	19:21	\$5.5M	1.4
Sam Gagner	74	10	21	31	46.7
	-1.4	96.8	51.0	15:07	\$3.15M
Brandon Sutter	61	11	15	26	43.3
	-6.6	102.0	22.7	17:19	\$4.375M
Loui Eriksson	50	10	13	23	49.1
	2.7	99.1	47.6	16:16	\$6.0M
Brendan Leipsic	58	5	17	22	48.8
	-2.5	99.8	56.1	13:08	\$650K
Derek Dorsett	20	7	2	9	44.4
	-6.6	98.4	31.0	15:17	\$2.65M
Brendan Gaunce	37	4	2	6	46.1
	-0.4	100.1	15.5	13:19	\$750K



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

Sven Baertschi	53	14	15	29	46.1
-1.7	102.5	54.1	15:36	\$1.85M	RFA
Jake Virtanen	75	10	10	20	49.3
2.4	99.2	43.9	11:59	\$894K	RFA
Jussi Jokinen	60	5	12	17	51.2
-0.1	99.6	46.1	11:35	\$1.1M	UFA
Markus Granlund	53	8	4	12	46.2
-2.1	96.8	37.5	16:15	\$900K	RFA
Darren Archibald	27	4	5	9	43.1
-6.4	100.6	19.8	14:52	\$650K	UFA
Reid Boucher	20	3	2	5	51.4
2.9	90.0	42.0	11:23	\$688K	RFA
Nic Dowd	56	3	4	46.6	-1.5
96.4	28.9	10:32	\$640K	UFA	

21-year-old right winger Brock Boeser burst onto the scene after a couple of years at the University of North Dakota, and he's scored 33 goals and 60 points in 71 NHL games. Even with a terrific release on his shot, he may have been somewhat fortunate shooting better than 16%, but he's a quality scoring winger who should be a fixture at the top of the Vancouver lineup.

Bo Horvat has steadily improved in each of his four seasons.

It's been a gradual process, but 23-year-old Bo Horvat has emerged as Vancouver's number one centre. He missed some time with an ankle injury, but still scored a career-high 22 goals. He had solid possession numbers, won 53.8% of his draws last season and is now tasked with playing big minutes on Vancouver's top line.

He seems so much older, since he's been in the league since he was 18, but 28-year-old Sam Gagner has established what he is at this point. He's not a great 5-on-5 player, with defensive shortcomings, but he's skilled enough to be effective on the power play.

Last season, Gagner was also saddled with a career-low 5.1% on-ice shooting percentage, so his offensive production was less than ideal, but that's also likely to bounce back, at least a little. He's effectively a placeholder in the lineup while the Canucks wait for more prospects to force their way into the lineup.

The Canucks seem to hold Brandon Sutter in higher esteem than his performance would justify, but Vancouver is committed to Sutter for three more years, and with a lot of young players making their way into the lineup, they should at least be able to count on Sutter for reliable work as a checking centre.

Veteran winger Loui Eriksson was an odd signing in the summer of 2016, and the results through his first two seasons with the Canucks have not been great. If the 32-year-old isn't going to be a power play and contributor and won't produce much offensively – he has 47 points in 115 games with Vancouver – then Eriksson could still be an effective checking winger. The problem with that is that he comes with a \$6-million cap hit for four more years, which seems outrageous and unnecessary for a player who isn't making a significant offensive contribution.

An undersized but feisty winger, Brendan Leipsic got a chance to play in Vegas, but was ultimately waived and landed a late-season audition with the Canucks, re-uniting with Travis Green, who had coached him in junior. Leipsic has offensive upside and has produced 25 points in 64 career games, but he's still at the stage of his career at which he's battling to secure a regular full-time spot in the lineup.

2012 first-round pick Brendan Gaunce has managed to score five goals in 114 games, but even though his offensive contributions are next to nothing, he's a reliable checking forward. Given his lack of production, he's replaceable, but offers some forward depth.

Moving to Vancouver has allowed Sven Baertschi to take on a bigger role offensively, and he's scored 49 goals in 193 games over the past three-

plus seasons. He may be getting propped up a bit if he stays on the top line with Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser, but if the Canucks find other alternatives, Baertschi could provide secondary scoring.

There is a cloud that hangs over Jake Virtanen, who was drafted sixth overall in 2014, because he's not as offensively gifted as players taken after the likes of Nikolaj Ehlers and William Nylander, but the big winger played a regular role last season and was okay in a limited role. If he could generate more offensively, that would really enhance the physical edge he brings to the game.

After his breakout year in 2016-2017, Markus Granlund crashed back to earth last season, scoring four even-strength goals in 53 games. He's a restricted free agent, so the price should be right to re-sign him, but he has to be counted on for depth more than a significant role.

The primary reason for optimism around the Canucks is the emergence of 19-year-old Elias Pettersson, the fifth pick in the 2017 Draft, who put up 75 points (34 G, 41 A) in 57 (regular season plus playoff) games for Vaxjo in the Swedish Hockey League. He's split time between wing and centre, but the value proposition for the Canucks would be to have Pettersson fit as a premier scoring centre.

The Canucks have other prospects on the way, including Jonathan Dahlen and Adam Gaudette, but it may be optimistic to count on them being NHL-ready for the start of next season. However, the sooner that these skilled forwards can make it into the lineup, the sooner that the Canucks' outlook will be shifting upwards.

Now, the Canucks do have cap room, so they can get into the free agent market. It may not be easy to convince top free agent targets to join a team that has struggled in recent years, but they should be able to find someone to take their money. Of course, they would love to land John Tavares, but Evander Kane, James Neal, Rick Nash or Tyler Bozak may all have some appeal. Kane, a Vancouver native who turns 27 this summer, would upgrade the team's skill level.

Alexander Edler	70	6	28	34	46.2
-1.6	98.6	45.2	24:17	\$5.0M	
Michael Del Zotto	82	6	16	22	46.1
-2.6	100.1	48.4	20:48	\$3.0M	
Chris Tanev	42	2	9	11	47.6
-1.2	101.3	42.8	19:47	\$4.45M	
Alex Biega	44	1	8	9	50.5
3.4	100.1	50.4	15:01	\$825K	
Ben Hutton	61	0	6	6	49.2
2.7	98.9	51.3	18:25	\$2.8M	
Erik Gudbranson	52	2	3	5	43.7
-6.1	99.8	43.8	18:25	\$3.5M	
Derrick Pouliot	71	3	19	22	50.3
3.4	96.9	56.3	17:51	\$800K	RFA
Troy Stecher	68	1	10	11	48.3
0.9	99.7	48.4	18:49	\$925K	RFA

Veteran defenceman Alexander Edler isn't necessarily a Norris Trophy candidate, but he's also a significant part of the Canucks blueline. He's played more than 23 minutes per game in eight straight seasons, more than 24 minutes per game in each of the past three years, and recorded 34 points last season, his best total since 2011-2012. He's also headed into the last year of his contract and would presumably have value on the trade market, if he is at all interested in waiving his no-trade clause.

Michael Del Zotto did stay healthy last season, for the first time in a while, but he wasn't particularly effective. The Canucks might very well need him to fill minutes on the blueline next year, but if they could find another club interested in his services, it would make sense to listen.

Off-injured blueliner Chris Tanev is an effective defensive presence, when healthy.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

28-year-old defenceman Chris Tanev has established a reputation as an effective shot suppressor, though he wasn't quite as effective in that regard last season, a season in which he played just 42 games. A healthy Tanev makes the Canucks better, but he's never played more than 70 games in an NHL season, and will always draw interest from contenders that think that he could tighten up their defensive play.

A 30-year-old who has played 138 career games in the NHL, Alex Biega has been reasonably effective in his reserve role over the past three seasons. He can move the puck, but isn't necessarily the most stout defender.

In his third season, Ben Hutton had his ice time cut back, as it became apparent that he wasn't a favourite of head coach Travis Green, even if his shot differentials weren't bad. Hutton is still under contract for another season, so maybe the Canucks would look to find him a new home, but they could do worse than giving Hutton another shot.

A towering physical presence, Erik Gudbranson appeals to old-school hockey types because he has the attributes that were so appealing a generation ago, but as the game gets quicker, he tends to be a liability, getting outshot significantly on a regular basis. Given that information, the Canucks still decided that it was a priority to get Gudbranson signed to a new three-year contract. It will come as a surprise if he provides a positive return on that investment.

The eighth pick in the 2012 Draft, Derrick Pouliot finally got a chance to play with the Canucks last season, and he showed some potential. He could be stronger in his own end, but does move the puck effectively.

In two seasons with the Canucks, undersized right-shot defenceman Troy Stecher has shown some promise, but also some vulnerability in the defensive zone.

Where the Canucks are lacking, it seems, is in terms of high-end blueliners. A lot of these guys are serviceable NHLers, but not so many look like top-pair calibre defencemen. Certainly the hope is for 2016 first-round pick Olli Juolevi to improve the talent on the Vancouver blueline. He had a solid season in Finland, but the fact that he was playing in Finland, and not Vancouver, was a little troubling. Nevertheless, given Vancouver's lack of elite defence prospects, they need Juolevi to keep making progress.

Additionally, there may be some quality defencemen available in the draft when Vancouver is up to pick at No. 7, and it's an area of need.

Jacob Markstrom	60	23	26	7	.912
	.924	\$3.667M			
Anders Nilsson	27	7	14	4	.901
	.913	\$2.5M			

28-year-old Jacob Markstrom got his first real shot as a starting goaltender, appearing in 60 games, last season. He has a .911 save percentage in 126 games with Vancouver, which is a little below average, but he's fine until the long-term starter arrives.

Jacob Markstrom received a new opportunity to start in Vancouver.

Anders Nilsson was signed to significant money for a backup role, presumably because Markstrom wasn't an established starter, but Nilsson struggled in Vancouver, leaving him highly-priced for what he offers.

The long-term answer in goal for the Canucks is Thatcher Demko, the 2014 second-round pick who was really good in the American Hockey League in 2017-2018. With Nilsson under contract for another year, the Canucks may be inclined to keep Demko in the AHL next year, but he's very clearly the goaltender of the future. It's just a matter of when that future becomes the present.

Elias Pettersson	C	44	24	32	56
	+27	Vaxjo (SHL)			

Olli Juolevi	D	38	7	12	19
	+7	TPS Turku (SML)			
Thatcher Demko	G	46			
	.922	Utica (AHL)			
Jonathan Dahlen	C	44	23	21	44
	+11	Timra IK (SWE)			
Adam Gaudette	C	38	30	30	60
	+12	Northeastern (HE)			
Kole Lind	RW	58	39	56	+24
		Kelowna (WHL)			
Jonah Gadjovich	LW	42	25	23	48
	+8	Owen Sound (OHL)			
Michael DiPietro	G	56			
	.910	Windsor (OHL)			
Nikita Tryamkin	D	53	9	16	25
	+12	Yekaterinburg (KHL)			
Lukas Jasek	RW	48	8	10	18
	-9	Liberec (Czech)			
Ashton Sautner	D	61	3	10	13
	+9	Utica (AHL)			
Guillaume Brisebois	D	68	3	15	18
	-6	Acadie-Bathurst (QMJHL)			
Zack MacEwen	C	66	10	23	33
	-20	Utica (AHL)			
William Lockwood	RW	16	4	7	11
	+5	Michigan (Big 10)			
Evan McEneny	D	11	2	5	7
	-4	Utica (AHL)			

### DRAFT

7th – Oliver Wahlstrom, Adam Boqvist, Quinn Hughes, Evan Bouchard

### FREE AGENCY

The Canucks have approximately \$52.0 M committed to the 2018-2019 salary cap for 16 players.

### NEEDS

Two top-six forwards, two top-four defencemen

### WHAT I SAID THE CANUCKS NEEDED LAST YEAR

Elite talent, two top-six forwards, one goaltender

### THEY ADDED

Thomas Vanek, Sam Gagner, Michael Del Zotto, Derrick Pouliot, Anders Nilsson

### TRADE MARKET

Sam Gagner, Michael Del Zotto, Ben Hutton, Chris Tanev, Anders Nilsson

Evander Kane*	Bo Horvat	Brock Boeser
Sven Baertschi	Elias Pettersson	Loui Eriksson
Brendan Leipsic	Brandon Sutter	Jake Virtanen
Brendan Gaunce	Sam Gagner	Markus Granlund
Jonathan Dahlen	Adam Gaudette	Nikolay Goldobin
Tyler Motte	Zack MacEwen	Reid Boucher



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

Alexander Edler    Christopher Tanev    Jacob Markstrom  
 Michael Del Zotto    Troy Stecher    Anders Nilsson  
 Derrick Pouliot    Erik Gudbranson    Thatcher Demko  
 Olli Juolevi    Alex Biega  
 Guillaume Brisebois    Ashton Sautner

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TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Detroit Red Wings

Scott Cullen

The Detroit Red Wings missed the playoffs for the second straight season and, from the looks of their roster, they have some work to do in order to turn this thing around.

Off-Season Game Plan looks at a Red Wings team that has some hard decisions to make about their long-term plan.

Considering the lack of star power on the roster right now, there is a very reasonable argument to make that Detroit should plan to tank, in order to improve their chances to acquire high-end talent around which they can rebuild.

That doesn't require dramatically sinking the team's hopes; really it's not much more than allowing nature to take its course with this roster. The Red Wings have seven picks in the first three rounds this year, and if they're in the lottery next year, then that would offer a shot at another high-end player.

While this might be a reasonable approach for a team with a new management team, looking at a five-year plan, I have my doubts that the current Red Wings management is prepared to do that.

As an aside, when I do these Off-Season Game Plans, I try to come up with a plan that seems reasonable and consistent for the current management and that means their established tendencies should be part of the consideration. Thus, even if I might think that the long-term plan for the Red Wings should be focused on a long-term rebuild, I'm skeptical that Red Wings GM Ken Holland would venture down that path.

So, if the Red Wings aren't necessarily going to strip this thing down to the studs, maybe they will accelerate their rebuilding plan by using some of their draft pick currency to acquire premier talent. This isn't a roster that just needs some tweaking, but if the Wings can acquire high-end talent that could be a cornerstone piece then that might be worth it.

### HOCKEY OPS/COACH

Ken Holland/Jeff Blashill

### HEROES

Dylan Larkin – The 21-year-old centre nearly doubled his point total from the previous season, leading the Red Wings with 63 points.

Anthony Mantha – It feels like he's scratching the surface, and finished the season with one goal in his last 16 games, but the 6-foot-5 winger also had a team-leading 24 goals and had the puck moving the right way when he was on the ice.

Henrik Zetterberg – The 37-year-old played in every game, scored 56 points, had stellar possession stats and the Wings outscored the opposition with him on the ice at evens. He doesn't need to be vintage Zetterberg to still be one of Detroit's best players.

### ZEROES

Trevor Daley – Last summer's free agent acquisition did get pushed into tough minutes, but he also was buried in the defensive zone, giving up quality scoring chances in the process.

Tomas Tatar – The 27-year-old winger did have his fourth straight 20-goal season but, before getting traded to Vegas, had managed a paltry 28 points in 62 games.

Luke Glendening – Detroit's checking centre faces tough usage, but he was stomped last season. As usual, he was on the wrong end of shot differentials and the Red Wings were outscored 33-16 at 5-on-5 with him on the ice.

Henrik Zetterberg	82	11	45	56	49.9
	1.6	100.9	53.0	19:30	\$6.083M
Gustav Nyquist	82	21	19	40	50.8
	2.9	100.4	53.9	17:51	\$4.75M
Justin Abdelkader	75	13	22	35	49.0
	0.2	99.2	48.8	16:33	\$4.25M
Frans Nielsen	79	16	17	33	48.6
	-0.3	100.1	43.2	15:50	\$5.25M
Darren Helm	75	13	18	31	47.1
	-2.5	100.0	42.5	15:34	\$3.85M
Luke Glendening	69	11	8	19	44.0
	-6.8	95.9	34.5	13:12	\$1.8M
Luke Witkowski	31	1	3	4	41.8
	-8.0	100.6	53.6	6:53	\$750K

Johan Franzen

\$3.955M

Dylan Larkin	82	16	47	63	50.4
	2.3	98.9	46.9	19:51	\$925K RFA
Anthony Mantha	80	24	24	48	51.7
	3.9	101.2	53.5	17:18	\$863K RFA
Andreas Athanasiou	71	16	17	33	49.0
	0.6	98.8	51.8	15:19	\$1.388M RFA
Martin Frk	68	11	14	25	50.0
	98.9	55.2	10:17	\$650K RFA	
Tyler Bertuzzi	48	7	17	24	46.7
	-2.1	99.0	43.5	14:24	\$662K RFA
David Booth	28	4	1	5	40.7
	-8.8	96.2	59.3	6:58	\$700K UFA

Elder statesman Henrik Zetterberg has played every game for each of the past three seasons, but it's reportedly quite a struggle for him to go through the grind night after night. Naturally, he's not the player that he used to be, but Zetterberg is still effective, capable of playing a solid two-way game. His salary dips to \$3.35-million next season, before going down to \$1-million for each of the following two years, so the end of the line is likely near, but he could still be part of the plans for next season.

Henrik Zetterberg remains one of Detroit's top forwards.

28-year-old Gustav Nyquist recorded his fifth straight 40-point season, but his total of 40 points was his lowest in the past five years. He's a shifty winger who can put the puck in the net, a three-time 20-goal scorer, and did have his name pop up in trade rumours last season. Maybe that gets re-visited in the summer or, if Nyquist starts the year in Detroit, before the trade deadline.

Veteran winger Justin Abdelkader plays a hard-nosed game, and has tended to play a complementary role on Detroit's scoring lines. There's plenty to like about a blue-collar player like Abdelkader, but the fact that



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

his contract has five more years (at a \$4.25-million cap hit) remaining is not one of them. He's 31 and that's already a shaky return on investment.

Detroit's decision to sign Frans Nielsen as a free agent in the summer of 2016 was suspect – the roster wasn't that of a playoff team, and Nielsen wasn't likely to change that. He's still a sound checking centre, but his offensive production has dipped (last season's 0.42 points per game was a career-low for a full season) and he's still under contract for four more seasons, at a \$5.25-million cap hit.

The third albatross contract among Red Wings forwards belongs to Darren Helm, a 31-year-old checker who has never scored more than 33 points in a season yet still has three more years (at \$3.85-million) left on his deal.

The challenge facing the Red Wings is whether they can find a way to at least get valuable contributions because those contracts take up significant space under the salary cap and those contracts all have various types of no-trade protection.

There aren't a lot of players that are used in the manner that the Red Wings use Luke Glendening. The 29-year-old is a face-off ace (he won 58.0% last season) and starts most of his shifts in the defensive zone, but he's consistently been on the wrong end of shot differentials, by a significant margin – he has a -8.1 CFRel% for his career – and he's still under contract for three more seasons. Like Abdelkader and Helm, Glendening is a gritty home-grown checking forward who has been over-compensated, though not to the same degree.

28-year-old Luke Witkowski was a defenceman at Western Michigan University and throughout much of his time in the Tampa Bay Lightning organization. Moving to Detroit last season, he was a part-time player, but primarily played right wing in a limited role, averaging less than seven minutes of ice time per game and leading the team with six fights.

21-year-old Dylan Larkin is a building block for the Red Wings' future. The speedy forward moved to centre ice full-time in his third season and scored a career-high 63 points; his 52 even-strength points was tied for 23rd in the league. He's due for a new contract as a restricted free agent this summer.

Towering and talented winger Anthony Mantha had a career-high 24 goals and 48 points last season but, if he puts it all together, he has the ability to do more. The challenge for the Red Wings is putting him in the position to best use his rare combination of size and scoring touch.

A very skilled player, 23-year-old Andreas Athanasiou scores highlight-reel goals because he has impressive speed and skill, but his all-around game remains a work in progress. He's scored 34 goals over the past two seasons, 32 of them at even strength. It would be easy enough to see Athanasiou become a regular 20-goal scorer and that surely has some value.

24-year-old winger Martin Frk finally made the league last season and while he didn't play a lot, he did show off an impressive shot. The challenge, to this point, is getting the rest of his game up to speed because he hasn't yet been able to earn a consistent role.

A wrist injury prevented Tyler Bertuzzi from starting the season with the Red Wings, but once he joined the lineup, he did show some potential. His shot differentials were still on the wrong side of the ledger, but he did score 22 of his 24 points at even strength.

The Red Wings will have some openings for prospects. Michael Rasmussen and Evgeny Svechnikov are the top two candidates. Even if Detroit doesn't have major expectations for next season, they can dip into free agency or the trade market to add established NHL depth.

Niklas Kronwall	79	4	23	27	49.1
	0.5	98.4	63.8	18:31	\$4.75M
Trevor Daley	77	9	7	16	46.2
	-3.9	100.0	42.4	20:42	\$3.167M

Nick Jensen	81	0	15	15	51.5
	3.7	98.2	47.9	16:15	\$813K
Jonathan Ericsson	81	3	10	13	47.8
	-1.7	99.0	39.4	19:19	\$4.25M
Danny DeKeyser	65	6	6	12	49.3
	1.0	100.5	44.8	20:19	\$5.0M
Xavier Ouellet	45	0	7	7	50.8
	2.2	98.6	48.9	13:51	\$1.25M
Mike Green	66	8	25	33	47.8
	-1.3	99.3	53.0	22:05	\$6.0M UFA

Veteran defenceman Niklas Kronwall has been maligned in recent seasons, with negative relative shot differentials, but he was quietly effective in 2017-2018. He's headed for the last year of his current contract, and while his cap hit may be higher than ideal, if Kronwall could duplicate his last season, that would be okay.

A two-time Stanley Cup winner with Pittsburgh, Trevor Daley played a big role for the Red Wings last season – his average time on ice of 20:42 per game was his highest since 2014-2015 – and that's not ideal because he tends to be on the wrong side of shot counts. He will be 35 early next season and is probably better suited to a complementary role, if possible.

Nick Jensen was a quietly solid contributor last season.

Unheralded blueliner Nick Jensen, who was a fifth-round pick in 2009, played in 81 games and provided strong defensive play for the Red Wings, giving him positive shot differentials, and that shouldn't be taken for granted. He didn't reach the NHL until he was 26-years-old, but Jensen has been a solid player, and it may be time to give him more responsibility.

The Red Wings locked into Jonathan Ericsson what seems like forever ago, as he has two years left on his current six-year deal. He starts more in the defensive zone, and his shot differentials aren't great, but the quality of shots against doesn't paint a pretty picture either.

Danny DeKeyser saw his possession numbers improve last season, especially when he was paired with Jensen, a much-needed positive sign for a player who still has four years left on his contract. Given the Red Wings' investment, it would be favourable if DeKeyser could handle a top-four role without getting outshot in dramatic fashion, as he was in the previous two seasons.

24-year-old Xavier Ouellet hasn't been able to establish himself as anything more than a fringe NHLer to this point in his career. His results have been okay, though, so if the Wings aren't sold on him, another team might see some potential value.

Detroit does have some quality blueline prospects on the way. Dennis Cholowski and Filip Hronek, 2016 first and second-rounders, respectively, are at the head of the class and may be ready to challenge for spots at some point next season.

If the Red Wings want to use some of the draft picks that they have accumulated, they could get into the market for an upgrade on the blueline. In Arizona's Off-Season Game Plan, I had the Red Wings dealing for Oliver Ekman-Larsson, but any move to add a star of that calibre would run contrary to any possible tanking plans. Additionally, while the Red Wings should be able to pay Ekman-Larsson market rate on his new contract, if he's anxious to play for a contender, Detroit might have some work to do to sell him on that possibility.

Jimmy Howard	60	22	27	9	.910
	.916	\$5.292M			
Jared Coreau	7	0	5	1	.867
	.891	\$613K	UFA		

Jimmy Howard started well last season, but his numbers steadily declined throughout the year. The 34-year-old has one year left on his



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

contract, and might as well finish it out as the Red Wings' starter, but it would make a lot of sense for the team to seek out a long-term option.

Jimmy Howard struggled last year after a strong 2016-2017 season.

In the meantime, there will be some backup goaltenders available on the trade market at a relatively inexpensive price. Al Montoya, Anders Nilsson, Curtis McElhinney and Michal Neuvirth are among the backups that could be acquired via trade, while Jonathan Bernier, Carter Hutton, Chad Johnson and, potentially (if he doesn't receive a qualifying offer) Robin Lehner could be of interest to the Red Wings.

Michael Rasmussen +17	C	47	31	28	59
	Tri-City (WHL)				
Dennis Cholowski +29	D	69	14	52	66
	Portland (WHL)				
Evgeny Svechnikov -4	RW	57	7	16	23
	Cape Breton (QMJHL)				
Filip Hronek +24	D	67	11	28	39
	Grand Rapids (AHL)				
Gustav Lindstrom +2	D	39	6	8	14
	Almtuna (SWE)				
Joe Hicketts -10	D	67	3	9	12
	Grand Rapids (AHL)				
Vili Saarijarvi -1	D	42	0	11	11
	Grand Rapids (AHL)				
Filip Larsson .941	G	30			
	Tri-City (USHL)				
Givani Smith +1	C	46	17	13	30
	Kitchener (OHL)				
Jordan Sambrook +43	D	67	10	29	39
	Sault Ste. Marie (OHL)				
Kasper Kotkansalo +12	D	40	2	4	6
	Boston University (HE)				
Dominic Turgeon +13	C	69	14	18	32
	Grand Rapids (AHL)				
Libor Sulak +5	D	42	9	23	32
	Pelicans (SML)				
Dan Renouf +4	D	73	2	10	12
	Grand Rapids (AHL)				
Axel Holmstrom -11	LW	66	7	19	26
	Grand Rapids (AHL)				

### DRAFT

6th – Evan Bouchard, Quinton Hughes, Adam Boqvist, Oliver Wahlstrom

28th – K'Andre Miller, Jacob Olofsson, Filip Hallander

### FREE AGENCY

The Red Wings have approximately \$56.9M committed to the 2018-2019 salary cap for 14 players.

### NEEDS

Three forwards, two top-pair defencemen, backup goaltender

### WHAT I SAID THE RED WINGS NEEDED LAST YEAR

Depth forwards, two top-pair defencemen

### THEY ADDED

Martin Frk, David Booth, Luke Witkowski, Trevor Daley

### TRADE MARKET

Gustav Nyquist, Luke Glendening, Andreas Athanasiou, Martin Frk, Jonathan Ericsson, Xavier Ouellet

Justin Abdelkader Dylan Larkin Anthony Mantha

Tyler Bertuzzi Henrik Zetterberg Gustav Nyquist

Michael Rasmussen Frans Nielsen Darren Helm

Remi Elie\* Luke Glendening Martin Frk

Evgeny Svechnikov Nic Dowd\* Luke Witkowski

David Pope Dominic Turgeon Matt Puempel

Oliver Ekman-Larsson\* Trevor Daley Jimmy Howard

Danny DeKeyser Nick Jensen Al Montoya\*

Niklas Kronwall Jonathan Ericsson Matej Machovsky

Dennis Cholowski Libor Sulak

Joe Hicketts Vili Saarijarvi

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TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Arizona Coyotes

Scott Cullen

The Arizona Coyotes didn't expect to be also-rans in 2017-2018. They made deals for proven veteran performers, expecting to be more competitive than a 70-point team.

Off-Season Game Plan looks at a Coyotes team that has recorded fewer than 80 points for four straight seasons, but they've accumulated young talent along the way, but they are operating on a budget, so it's still an uphill fight.

Because of that budget, and the team's relative lack of success in recent years – missing the playoffs for six straight seasons – there may be a major move brewing with the Coyotes. Star defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson has one year left on his deal, and if he's not inclined to stick around, it would be incumbent on the Coyotes to explore what they could get in a trade.

The positive for Arizona is that they do have a lot of young talent playing in significant roles, so internal improvement is one avenue that should help generate better results, but if the Coyotes are going to close the gap on a playoff spot, making up more than 25 points in the standings, they likely need to be more aggressive when it comes to player acquisition.

To do this in a summer in which they might have to deal their franchise defencemen, well, let's just say that GM John Chayka probably has his hands full.

### HOCKEY OPS/COACH

John Chayka/Rick Tocchet

### HEROES

Clayton Keller – The seventh pick in the 2016 Draft stepped into the league and put up a team-leading 65 points in 82 games as a rookie.

Derek Stepan – For the fifth consecutive season, Stepan finished with a point total between 53 and 57 points and, as usual, his team had better shot differentials when he was on the ice.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

Antti Raanta – Although he missed some time due to injury, the 28-year-old responded well to his chance in the starter's role, posting a .930 save percentage in 47 games.

### ZEROES

Max Domi – The third-year winger scored four of his season-total nine goals in the last 13 games of the season.

Alex Goligoski – The veteran blueliner had the worst relative possession numbers of his career and the Coyotes were outscored 64-40 with him on the ice in 5-on-5 situations.

Brad Richardson – He did make it back from a broken leg in the previous season, but the veteran centre managed just three goals in 76 games.

Clayton Keller	82	23	42	65	48.4	
	0.4	100.5	56.4	18:05	\$886K	
Derek Stepan	82	14	42	56	49.2	
	1.5	101.3	49.5	19:16	\$6.5M	
Christian Dvorak	78	15	22	37	48.3	
	-0.2	98.9	46.1	16:26	\$839K	
Richard Panik	72	14	21	35	55.3	
	5.6	100.9	53.7	15:12	\$2.8M	
Christian Fischer	79	15	18	33	48.2	
	0.2	99.6	44.3	13:54	\$822K	
Brendan Perlini	74	17	13	30	47.0	
	-1.4	102.7	48.9	14:31	\$863K	
Nick Cousins	71	12	7	19	49.6	
	1.2	97.6	40.0	12:52	\$1.0M	
Marcus Kruger	48	1	5	6	54.4	
	1.0	95.8	45.4	10:50	\$1.8M	
Josh Archibald	42	5	6	11	47.4	
	-1.7	100.0	46.3	11:57	\$675K	
Dave Bolland					\$5.5M	
Max Domi	82	9	36	45	48.0	
	100.9	55.0	16:42	\$863K	RFA	
Brad Richardson	76	3	12	15	47.9	
	-0.4	95.5	34.4	14:46	\$2.083M	UFA
Zac Rinaldo	53	5	2	7	43.2	
	-4.8	100.0	43.2	11:17	\$700K	UFA
Freddie Hamilton	16	0	1	1	48.6	
	-3.5	98.7	44.2	8:59	\$613K	RFA

A creative playmaker with star potential, Clayton Keller burst onto the scene scoring right away, went through a slump, and then finished strong on his way to a 65-point rookie season. While the Coyotes wait for other players to pick up the scoring pace, Keller is the clear offensive leader.

Clayton Keller showed game-breaking talent as a rookie.

Acquired from the Rangers to provide veteran leadership on a young team, Derek Stepan offered his typically reliable season, with strong two-way play in addition to tying Keller for the team lead with 42 assists. Stepan also finished with a career-low 14 goals while shooting just 6.7%, so there is some room for improved production, even if his point totals fell within his standard range.

22-year-old centre Christian Dvorak has shown some potential in his first two NHL seasons, and he improved his game in his second season even though his on-ice percentages dipped. Can he take his game to another level? Is there a bigger role for him?

A skilled yet inconsistent winger, Richard Panik was acquired in a trade with Chicago and was a solid contributor with 19 points in 35 games for the Coyotes. He had an off-ice incident that might be some cause for concern, but he's a capable secondary scorer.

21-year-old Christian Fischer had a solid showing as a rookie, displaying some offensive ability while still needing further development to round out his game.

Like Fischer, Brendan Perlini is a winger with good size and the 22-year-old has scored 31 goals in 131 NHL games. The questions for both Fischer and Perlini are whether they can become productive 20-25 goal-scorers, which seems possible, and when that day might arrive.

24-year-old Nick Cousins had a career-high 12 goals and 19 points last season, which should keep expectations modest but, beyond point production, he was a solid player, with positive relative possession numbers despite starting more shifts in the defensive zone.

After six-plus seasons with the Blackhawks, Marcus Kruger fell out of favour rather quickly in Carolina last year, and he's landed in Arizona, which could be a really good fit. The Coyotes, for all the young talent they have up front, desperately need some forwards that can play shutdown minutes and Kruger, who has six goals in 159 games over the past three seasons, has experience playing tough defensive minutes.

Speedy winger Josh Archibald played a career-high 42 games last season. He's on the lineup bubble, but may have found a role to play in Arizona.

Arizona has a couple of forward prospects knocking on the door as well. Dylan Strome, the third pick in 2015, has just 10 points in 28 NHL games, but he had a terrific season in the AHL in 2017-2018, scoring 53 points in 50 games. His results with the Coyotes were better than they had been previously, so maybe he's turning the corner and will be ready to contribute as a scoring centre.

A lower-body injury ended Nick Merkley's season prematurely, but the 21-year-old finished with 39 points in 38 AHL games, so he may soon be ready for his shot with the Coyotes.

Oliver Ekman-Larsson	82	14	28	42
	51.1	4.6	98.3	45.9
			23:41	\$5.5M
Alex Goligoski	78	12	23	35
	-2.9	98.0	43.9	23:17
				\$5.475M
Jason Demers	69	6	14	20
	4.5	99.0	45.7	21:08
				\$3.938M
Jakob Chychrun	50	4	10	14
	-1.6	101.3	55.4	20:15
				\$925K
Niklas Hjalmarsson	48	1	8	9
	-2.8	99.0	45.0	20:42
				\$4.1M
Kevin Connauton	73	11	10	21
	-1.1	102.6	47.5	15:11
				\$1.0M
UFA				
Luke Schenn	64	1	6	7
	-3.3	97.8	40.6	16:23
				\$1.25M
UFA				

The franchise's star defenceman for the past eight seasons, Oliver Ekman-Larsson is coming to a crossroads, as he enters the final year of his current contract. Since 2013-2014, he has scored 85 goals, tied with Brent Burns (who played one year on right wing) with the most goals among defencemen. He's also strong defensively, a bona fide No. 1 defenceman.

The issue for the Coyotes is that if they aren't going to get Ekman-Larsson signed to a long-term contract extension, then they probably have to consider dealing him this summer, because there's just no way, especially for a team not expected to be in the playoffs, to justify losing Ekman-Larsson for nothing at the end of next season. The good news is that there will be no shortage of suitors if Ekman-Larsson is available, so the Coyotes should be able to extract some value in return.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

It was a rough season for veteran defenceman Alex Goligoski, even though he scored 12 goals, his most since 2010-2011. He played on both the left and right side, but the Coyotes were buried with him on the ice.

He's moved around a bit in recent seasons, but Jason Demers has settled into a role as a reliable, top-four, right-shot defenceman who can handle 20-plus minutes per game. His numbers may have been inflated by primarily playing with Oliver Ekman-Larsson last season, but his track record goes beyond last season too.

Will Jakob Chychrun be asked to play a bigger role next season?

A knee injury left 20-year-old Jakob Chychrun on the shelf to start last season, but he played well once he returned to the lineup. He has had the luxury of not being force-fed minutes in his first two seasons, but it could be time for him to step into a more significant role in his third season, especially if Ekman-Larsson is moved.

A premier shutdown defenceman when he was with Chicago, Niklas Hjalmarsson did not fare as well in his first season with Arizona, missing significant time with injuries, and with one year left on his contract, it's possible that he could be trade bait either this summer, or before the trade deadline.

It has been rumoured that the Coyotes are in on Russian defenceman Ilya Lyubushkin, a 24-year-old right-shot defenceman who has been playing for Yaroslavl Lokomotiv in the KHL. He could add some bite to the third pair if he can make a smooth adjustment to North America.

While the Coyotes have some defence prospects in the pipeline, they could use some more time to develop, so it could make some sense to add a veteran free agent. Ian Cole, Nick Holden, Thomas Hickey, and Jack Johnson are among the veterans who might be worth considering for the right price.

Antti Raanta	47	21	17	6	.930
	.936	\$4.25M			
Darcy Kuemper	29	12	7	5	.920
	.927	\$1.85M			

Arizona took a bit of a chance on Antti Raanta as their starting goaltender, and he responded with an outstanding season, posting a .942 save percentage in 27 games after January 1. He will be 29 next season and earned a three-year contract extension.

Antti Raanta impressed in his first season as a starter.

At the trade deadline, the Coyotes picked up Darcy Kuemper from Los Angeles. The 28-year-old was in the midst of the best season of his career but, not altogether surprisingly, his numbers dipped (from a .932 save percentage in 19 games with the Kings, to a .899 save percentage in 10 games with the Coyotes) after he arrived in Arizona.

Even so, the Coyotes inked Kuemper to a two-year contract extension so, for better or worse, they have found the goaltending tandem that they will lean on going forward.

Dylan Strome	C	50	22	31	53
	+8	Tucson (AHL)			
Nick Merkley	RW	38	18	21	39
	+6	Tucson (AHL)			
Pierre-Olivier Joseph		D	63	13	33
	46	-5	Charlottetown (QMJHL)		
Lawson Crouse	LW	56	15	17	32
	+3	Tucson (AHL)			
Kyle Capobianco	D	49	2	28	30
	+9	Tucson (AHL)			
Adin Hill	G	36			.914
		Tucson (AHL)			

Tyler Steenbergen	RW	56	47	55	102
	+52	Swift Current (WHL)			
Filip Westerlund	D	19	0	2	2
	-4	Frolunda (SHL)			
Cam Dineen	D	65	20	44	64
	-4	Sarnia (OHL)			
Michael Bunting	LW	67	23	20	43
	+21	Tucson (AHL)			
Trevor Murphy	D	59	10	25	35
	+2	Tucson (AHL)			
Kyle Wood	D	49	3	16	19
	+12	Tucson (AHL)			
Laurent Dauphin	C	50	9	20	29
	-1	Tucson (AHL)			
Ryan MacInnis	C	59	6	8	14
	+3	Tucson (AHL)			
Lane Pederson	C	63	12	14	26
	+3	Tucson (AHL)			

### DRAFT

5th – Brady Tkachuk, Evan Bouchard, Quinton Hughes, Adam Boqvist

### FREE AGENCY

The Coyotes have approximately \$52.1M committed to the 2018-2019 salary cap for 17 players.

### NEEDS

Two top-six forwards, two defenceman

### WHAT I SAID THE COYOTES NEEDED LAST YEAR

Four top-nine forwards, one top-four defenceman

### THEY ADDED

Clayton Keller, Derek Stepan, Nick Cousins, Zac Rinaldo, Mario Kempe, Jason Demers, Niklas Hjalmarsson

### TRADE MARKET

Richard Panik, Christian Dvorak, Dylan Strome, Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Niklas Hjalmarsson

Max Domi	Derek Stepan	Clayton Keller
Andreas Athanasiou*	Christian Dvorak	Richard Panik
Brendan Perlini	Dylan Strome	Christian Fischer
Nick Cousins	Marcus Kruger*	Josh Archibald
Lawson Crouse	Laurent Dauphin	Nick Merkley
Michael Bunting	Freddie Hamilton	Tyler Steenbergen
Jakob Chychrun	Jason Demers	Antti Raanta
Alex Goligoski	Niklas Hjalmarsson	Darcy Kuemper
Ian Cole*	Ilya Lyubushkin*	Adin Hill
Kyle Capobianco	Filip Hronek*	
Trevor Murphy	Jordan Gross	

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Ottawa Senators

Scott Cullen

The Ottawa Senators were within a goal of reaching the Stanley Cup Final in 2017, which created expectations for the team heading into last season, and they fell flat.

Off-Season Game Plan examines a team that looks like it is headed for a crossroads this summer, facing the possibility that they may need to trade their franchise player.

The storyline that has dominated the Senators news since December is that defenceman Erik Karlsson, the team's best player, expects to get fair market price when he's a free agent following the 2018-19 season.

That's not an unreasonable expectation, by any stretch, but the Senators don't seem to be a team in the business of handing out long-term contracts that have cap hits north of \$10 million per season. That puts the Sens in a tough spot, because if they aren't prepared to sign Karlsson long-term, then they really ought to move him this summer, before the final year on his current contract.

There were reports that the Senators nearly traded Karlsson before the trade deadline, so it's not as though this idea hasn't been explored, and the off-season will present another opportunity to make that trade.

If the Senators trade Karlsson, there is the idea that Ottawa will include Bobby Ryan, and the last four years of his big-money contract, in the deal. That would provide some financial relief, but that comes at a cost because it means that Ottawa would receive a lesser package of players and picks in return.

Nevertheless, any kind of Karlsson trade will likely be hard to sell to the Senators fan base because, generally, NHL teams don't trade their best players away.

It doesn't mean that the Senators can't move in the right direction, but they will need to get good value for Karlsson and figure out how they are going to build a core going forward. Does that include Mike Hoffman, Mark Stone, and Matt Duchene? Who else?

The challenge that the Senators face is that there is a perception that ownership isn't willing to spend what's necessary to be a competitive team. They did spend more than \$72 million against the \$75-million salary cap last season, but if Karlsson is shed for financial reasons and Ryan's salary comes off the books, will the new plan involve spending significant money elsewhere, or will it be a cash savings for the Senators?

The off-season tends to be a time for optimism, because teams have a chance to get more talent, but the Senators seem to be a team in turmoil, or they will be until the Karlsson situation is resolved.

### HOCKEY OPS/COACH

Pierre Dorion/Guy Boucher

### HEROES

Mark Stone – Even though he missed 24 games due to a leg injury, the star winger produced better than a point-per-game and, as usual, the puck was moving in the right direction when he was on the ice.

Erik Karlsson – Although last season was not quite up to his usual standards, as best in the league, the Senators star blueliner was still driving play and topped 60 points for the fifth straight season.

Mike Hoffman – The 28-year-old winger recorded his fourth straight 20-goal season, even though he shot just 8.6%. Good things can happen when you generate more than three shots on goal per game.

### ZEROES

Dion Phaneuf and Cody Ceci – Before Phaneuf was traded to Los Angeles, this was one of the worst defence pairings in the league, compiling a 39.7 CF% and 36.9 xGF% in 53 games.

Craig Anderson – One year after posting one of the best seasons of his career, under trying circumstances, the 36-year-old stumbled to quite possibly his worst season in 2017-18, with his .898 save percentage a career-low.

Zack Smith – After scoring a combined 41 goals in the previous two seasons, the 30-year-old managed just five in 68 games last season, and the Senators were outscored 56-25 with Smith on the ice at even strength.

Matt Duchene	82	27	32	59	47.8	
	0.8	99.7	50.1	18:20	\$6.0M	
Mike Hoffman	82	22	34	56	48.1	
	1.3	98.9	53.2	18:24	\$5.188M	
Ryan Dzingel	79	23	18	41	48.3	
	1.5	99.1	50.8	16:30	\$1.8M	
Bobby Ryan	62	11	22	33	48.4	
	1.9	99.1	50.4	16:27	\$7.25M	
Jean-Gabriel Pageau		78	14	15	29	
	46.2	-1.9	98.1	42.2	16:44	\$3.1M
Tom Pyatt		81	7	15	43.0	
	-5.5	98.3	40.0	14:03	\$1.1M	
Marian Gaborik		46	11	10	49.1	
	-0.4	101.3	55.9	13:58	\$4.875M	
Zack Smith		68	5	14	45.9	
	-1.0	95.8	45.7	16:43	\$3.25M	
Alex Burrows		71	6	8	46.5	
	-0.6	97.5	49.6	11:41	\$2.5M	
Max McCormick		30	3	2	45.8	
	-1.8	95.4	53.4	8:21	\$650K	
Clarke MacArthur					\$4.65M	
Mark Stone		58	20	42	51.5	
	4.7	100.7	52.8	20:40	\$3.5M	RFA
Magnus Paajarvi		79	8	4	46.1	
	-4.1	97.8	38.3	12:27	\$800K	UFA

The Senators paid a steep price to acquire Matt Duchene and, after some early struggles (he had two points in his first 12 games for Ottawa), he showed the kind of game-breaking offensive talent that was expected. Now, it happened as the team was sinking, but Duchene ought to be a core piece for the Senators, and that could mean a contract extension as soon as this summer.

Matt Duchene, Mike Hoffman and Ryan Dzingel are three of Ottawa's core forwards.

A great skater who can fire the puck, Mike Hoffman's even-strength scoring has dropped from its peak a few years ago, but he's scored 104 goals in the past four seasons, and that's good enough to rank 24th in the league over that time. He's also found his way into trade rumours lately, and it's possible that he would get moved this summer, but if the Senators are intending to be competitive in 2018-2019, the lineup probably needs to include Hoffman.

Ryan Dzingel has developed into a solid contributor for the Senators, putting up 23 goals in his second full season. He's probably not going to keep shooting 17%, so he needs to keep generating more shots to



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

maintain his production but, on this roster, he should be looking at a significant role.

Early in his career, Bobby Ryan was a premier goal-scorer, scoring at least 30-plus in each of his first four full seasons, but he's staggered to 24 goals in 124 games over the past two seasons. With four years at a \$7.25-million cap hit remaining on his contract, Ryan isn't likely to provide much value for the Senators and reports have indicated that he's being attached in any potential Erik Karlsson trade, just to get that unseemly contract off the books.

A speedy checking centre who can chip in some offensively, Jean-Gabriel Pageau may need to handle more responsibility next season as the Senators potentially work some new centres into the lineup.

A favourite of head coach Guy Boucher, Tom Pyatt has 45 points in two seasons with the Senators, but he's also been crushed in terms of possession (43.5 CF%, -5.7 CFRel%) since returning from the Swiss League. Given those results, he probably doesn't have to keep playing 14-15 minutes per game.

Acquired as part of the Dion Phaneuf deal, 36-year-old winger Marian Gaborik has 407 career goals, is a shell of his former self and seems headed for a buyout, although he's had back surgery and that could potentially get in the way of those plans.

Veteran forward Zack Smith can play centre of wing, and has contributed some secondary offence in past seasons, but he struggled mightily in 2017-2018, and yet he played 16:43 per game, which was a lot given his contributions.

It was remarkably easy to see that signing Alex Burrows to a contract upon acquiring him in 2017 was ill-advised and he just wrapped up a season in which he had six goals and 14 points. The 37-year-old is under contract for one more year.

Max McCormick is a gritty 26-year-old winger who is on the roster bubble. He's managed nine points in 57 NHL games over the past three seasons, which doesn't exactly break down the walls preventing him from being a regular in the lineup.

A superb all-around player, Mark Stone is a tenacious forechecker who has good hands and offensive instincts. Over the past four seasons, he's established that he's a high-end performer and the 25-year-old is a restricted free agent this summer. That would, at least theoretically, make him a risk to receive an offer sheet, but if the Senators do end up trading Erik Karlsson, they can't afford to let Stone leave too.

Erik Karlsson	71	9	53	62	50.9
	5.7	97.0	54.9	26:44	\$6.5M
Thomas Chabot	63	9	16	25	48.7
	3.2	98.9	62.1	17:31	\$863K
Mark Borowiecki	52	3	8	11	46.3
	0.3	98.3	40.7	14:39	\$1.2M
Christian Wolanin	10	1	2	3	53.4
	6.2	93.9	64.6	14:39	\$925K
Ben Harpur	41	0	1	1	45.9
	-3.6	93.7	39.7	14:53	\$725K
Cody Ceci	82	5	14	19	44.3
	-4.8	98.9	42.4	23:20	\$2.8M RFA
Chris Wideman	16	3	5	8	52.3
	6.3	106.6	58.9	11:33	\$800K UFA
Fredrik Claesson	64	1	6	7	46.9
	-0.7	98.7	51.4	15:21	\$650K RFA

It sure appears that the Senators superstar blueliner, Erik Karlsson, is going to find his way to a new team this summer because the team isn't prepared to pay the market price, which could run towards \$12-million, when Karlsson is scheduled to hit free agency in the summer of 2019.

Since 2013-2014, Karlsson has compiled 355 points to rank first among defencemen. Brent Burns, who ranks second (and spent the first of those seasons at right wing), has 278 points.

If Karlsson is moved, that may add to the pressure on 2015 first-rounder Thomas Chabot, a promising puck-moving defenceman who scored nine even-strength goals in 63 games as a rookie, ranking right near the leaders in goals/60 among blueliners last season. It may be a little soon to thrust Chabot into big minutes but, given the alternatives, what choice would the Senators have?

Thomas Chabot may be in the spotlight for the Senators very soon.

Mark Borowiecki is a thumper on the blueline, who hits far more than any other defenceman (he averaged 19.1 hits/60 at 5-on-5 last season; Luke Schenn ranked second with 13.5 hits/60) and while he struggled in his early years in the league, he's held his own with slightly positive relative possession numbers over the past couple of seasons. He has limitations with the puck, but seems to have found his niche.

A fourth-round pick in 2015, Christian Wolanin joined the Senators following his junior year at the University of North Dakota, where he put up 35 points in 40 games. He got a 10-game look with the Senators late in the season and was impressive, which should give the 23-year-old a leg up on competition for a job next season.

Twenty-three-year-old Ben Harpur is a towering presence, at 6-foot-6, but he has struggled to keep up in the 52 NHL games that he's played. Without further improvement, he can't be counted on for anything more than organizational depth.

The direction of the Senators defence could very well be determined by how they handle Cody Ceci, a 24-year-old who has played more than 23 minutes per game in the past two seasons. Thrust into that big responsibility, Ceci has been crushed in terms of puck possession (-4.6 CFRel%). He fared a bit better once Dion Phaneuf was traded to Los Angeles, but it requires a leap of faith to think that everything is cool with Ceci handling a shutdown defensive role.

He's also a restricted free agent this summer, and it appears that the Senators are inclined to get him signed to a new long-term contract. If the results don't get better, a long-term deal could pose a major problem.

Twenty-five-year-old Fredrik Claesson has gradually been working his way into the Senators lineup, and his results have been okay, though he's spent quite a bit of time paired with Karlsson, and that tilts the ice in a more favourable direction. He's steady without a lot of upside.

A torn hamstring ruined Chris Wideman's 2017-18 season, limiting him to just 16 games, and he's an unrestricted free agent, but it might be a wise move for the Senators to keep him in the fold. He plays bigger than his size and can handle the puck, which could prove valuable if indeed Karlsson is moved.

Really, any needs on the blueline are going to be most dependent on what happens with Karlsson. If he's around, they can probably put forth a decent group, but it will get more challenging if Karlsson gets traded.

Craig Anderson	58	23	25	6	.898
	.901	\$4.75M			
Mike Condon	31	5	17	5	.902
	.920	\$2.4M			

Veteran goaltender Craig Anderson has been an above-average starter since joining the Senators in 2011, but he went through a tough season in 2017-18, posting the worst save percentage of his career. He has two years left on a new contract, so the Senators have to hope that Anderson will bounce back. It's not unreasonable to hope for a goaltender to bounce back from a down season, but it's a little riskier as the player gets older and Anderson will be 37-years-old next season.

The Senators need veteran netminder Craig Anderson to be better next season.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

Mike Condon wasn't as good last season as he was in 2016-17, but he too has two more years left on his contract, so the Senators have to hope that the goaltending answer lies in-house.

Logan Brown +4	C	32	22	26	48
	Kitchener (OHL)				
Colin White -17	C	47	11	16	27
	Belleville (AHL)				
Drake Batherson +12	RW	51	29	48	77
	Blainville-Boisbriand (QMJHL)				
Alex Formenton +6	LW	48	29	19	48
	London (OHL)				
Filip Gustavsson .918	G	22			
	Lulea (SHL)				
Filip Chlapik -16	C	52	11	21	32
	Belleville (AHL)				
Christian Wolanin +12	D	40	12	23	35
	North Dakota (NCHC)				
Christian Jaros -10	D	44	3	13	16
	Belleville (AHL)				
Gabriel Gagne -11	RW	68	20	5	25
	Belleville (AHL)				
Nick Paul Belleville (AHL)	LW	54	14	13	27
	-17				
Ville Pokka +5	D	69	7	26	33
	Belleville (AHL)				
Francis Perron -8	LW	44	4	11	15
	Belleville (AHL)				
Marcus Hogberg .899	G	18			
	Belleville (AHL)				
Andreas Englund -4	D	69	1	9	10
	Belleville (AHL)				
Max Lajoie -9	D	56	1	14	15
	Belleville (AHL)				

### DRAFT

4th – Brady Tkachuk, Evan Bouchard, Quinton Hughes, Adam Boqvist

22nd – Ryan McLeod, Vitali Kravtsov, Nils Lundkvist, Martin Kaut

### FREE AGENCY

The Senators have approximately \$59.5 M committed to the 2018-19 salary cap for 17 players.

### NEEDS

Three top-nine forwards, two defencemen

### WHAT I SAID THE SENATORS NEEDED LAST YEAR

Two forwards, one defenceman, backup goaltender

### THEY ADDED

Nate Thompson, Johnny Oduya

### TRADE MARKET

Mike Hoffman, Bobby Ryan, Zack Smith, Erik Karlsson

Ryan Dzingel      Matt Duchene      Mike Hoffman

Zack Smith      Jean-Gabriel Pageau      Mark Stone

Thomas Vanek\*      Logan Brown      Jannik Hansen\*

Alex Burrows	Dominic Moore*	Tom Pyatt
Max McCormick	Filip Chlapik	Gabriel Gagne
Nick Paul	Colin White	Andy Sturtz
Thomas Chabot	Fredrik Claesson	Craig Anderson
Mark Borowiecki	Cody Ceci	Mike Condon
Jon Merrill*	Chris Wideman	Filip Gustavsson
Christian Wolanin	Christian Jaros	
Ben Harpur	Ville Pokka	

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TSN.CA / Scheifele gunning for Riverton Rifle's playoff goals record

Frank Seravalli

WINNIPEG - Reggie Leach chuckled, thinking back to that spring in 1976 and his taste of the magic Jets centre Mark Scheifele is feeling today.

The only skater to win the Conn Smythe Trophy in a losing effort in Stanley Cup history is one of the few who knows what it's like to be the man with the hot hands. Leach scored in a record 10 consecutive playoff games for the Philadelphia Flyers.

"I remember coming to the rink just knowing I would score, sooner or later," Leach said in a phone interview Sunday. "It didn't matter where I was on the ice, I could score. That's a pretty powerful feeling."

With 12 goals in 13 games, Scheifele is gunning for the Riverton Rifle's other playoff record set 42 years ago – the 19 goals he scored in a single postseason.

It's an incredible achievement considering an entire round has been added to the playoffs since 1976. While none of Leach's goals were empty-netters, Scheifele has three of those in these playoffs.

Edmonton's Jari Kurri tied Leach's mark in 1985, but as Leach pointed out, Kurri required two more games to do it. Kurri entered the Stanley Cup Final with 18 goals and netted only one against Dave Poulin and the Flyers. Two of Kurri's 19 were empty-net goals.

The most any player has scored this century is 15 – by Sidney Crosby in 2009 – and Scheifele still has potentially 13 more games to play.

Leach said if his record had to go down, he was happy it would be by a player from the team in his home province of Manitoba. He grew up 150 kilometres north of Winnipeg in Riverton.

"I've been watching all the games," Leach said. "If he breaks it, he breaks it. I give him a lot of credit, Scheifele has had a wonderful year. He is a very talented player."

Leach, now 68, is proud of his records, but they do not define him. His life now is dedicated to helping First Nations youth. He lives on Manitoulin Island, Ont., on the northern edge of Lake Huron – about a five-hour drive from Toronto – and said he drives 100,000 kilometres a year to mentor at-risk kids.

"Hockey was just a stepping stone in my life," said Leach, a member of Berens River First Nation. "These kids, they listen to me because I was a hockey player. The message is more important. We talk about life choices, drugs and alcohol, the difference between right and wrong. A lot of these kids, they don't have parents who deliver that message."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018

Bill Barber, Bobby Clarke and Reggie Leach formed the Flyers' famed LCB line.

They listen to Leach's message because he's lived it. After battling alcoholism during his playing career, Leach entered rehab in 1985 and has been sober since.

Leach said he reaches 20,000 to 30,000 kids every year. At each event, Leach hands out an autographed photograph and on the back is his personal cell phone number with an invitation to call him at any time, day or night.

The 30 or so kids who have taken him up on his offer in their darkest moments are more important to him than any playoff scoring record.

"Sometimes, I will get a call at 3 o'clock in the morning," Leach said. "We will just sit there, with my wife, Dawn, and talk and try to help. Sometimes you only need to listen."

There is no question that Scheifele, a self-described "hockey nerd," knows about Leach's all-time mark that is 17 years older than him. Scheifele's roommate, Andrew Copp, said he's "always dialled in all the time."

"He's always talking hockey, thinking about hockey," Copp said. "He eats all the right things, does all the right things to recovery and prepare. He has a little bit of fun, too. It's not like he's robotic. But it's hard to give him too much credit because I'll hear about it all y."

Game 1 had to feel strange for Scheifele in that he scored his first goal on Bell MTS Place ice since Game 5 of the first round when the Jets spanked Minnesota. He scored seven goals in seven games in the second round, but all of them were in Nashville.

"Any time we've needed a big goal, he always finds the back of the net," Copp said. "He's been huge for us at huge times over the course of the playoffs so far."

Leach wasn't watching hockey in 1985 when Kurri tied his record. His 934-game NHL career wrapped up two years earlier and he remained living in Philadelphia. He rediscovered his love for the NHL when he remarried and moved back to Canada about 12 years ago and began speaking and mentoring.

"Best move I've ever made," Leach said.

Leach, now 68, is proud of his records, but they do not define him. His life now is dedicated to helping First Nations youth.

Leach coached for two seasons in the Northern Ontario Junior Hockey League. He runs a summer hockey school for eight weeks each year with his son, former Pittsburgh Penguin Jamie Leach, them being the only First Nations father-son duo with their names on the Stanley Cup.

Jamie lives in Winnipeg and has attended Jets games this season. Leach said he'd like to see the Jets in person, maybe even to be there if Scheifele has a shot to break his record.

"If he breaks it, I will be the first one to call him and congratulate him," Leach said. "Records are made to be broken, right? It's been a good run."

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TSN.CA / Jets' lineup presents a problem for Golden Knights

Travis Yost

Nine games down, seven games to go.

The Winnipeg Jets took care of business in Game 1 of the Western Conference Final, jumping out to an early three-goal lead and carrying it to a 4-2 victory. The final score was probably a bit more kind to Vegas than the actual game showed – Vegas was chasing nearly the entire game and Winnipeg, especially down the stretch, was willing to throttle down and bottle things up in the defensive zone.

There were two key takeaways from Game 1. The first is that the Jets accomplished in one period what the San Jose Sharks and Los Angeles Kings couldn't deliver once in 10 games, creating extreme discomfort for Knights goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury. Fleury was bound to have a bad stretch at some point – he was stopping over 95 per cent of shots coming into the third round, which is obviously unsustainable. But the Jets didn't make it easy for him, either.

There was incredible traffic in front of Fleury on three of the four Jets goals. Paul Stastny was camped out in the crease right before Patrik Laine's one-timer for Winnipeg's second goal. Joel Armia scored on a redirect in the paint – a play that was initially ruled goaltender interference but overturned by Toronto. Mark Scheifele was amidst a sea of traffic – he was the fifth and final body in front of Dustin Byfuglien's point shot on Winnipeg's fourth goal. The Jets talked about screening Fleury and forcing him into uncomfortable save positions, and they delivered in a big way.

The other interesting storyline was how Winnipeg matched up against Vegas with last change. Coming into the series I wrote that Vegas had two ways to pull off a series upset – they needed the aforementioned Fleury to be great, of course, and they needed their top line to dominate. Vegas have been a handful to deal with all season long because their top line has been so good and their depth usually can outskate the opposition. I'm not sure that's the case against Winnipeg, a team that seems just as deep and just as talented throughout the lineup.

Still, it's not an easy question to answer if you are Paul Maurice. You want to ensure that Jonathan Marchessault, William Karlsson and Reilly Smith don't run wild on you the way they have everyone else this season, but you also can't be paralyzed by that matchup. At the end of the day, that line only plays 30 per cent of the game – there is still plenty of time at 5-on-5 and in special teams to score goals, and you can score an awful lot of goals in those minutes.

In that light, I was curious to see if Winnipeg would do anything quirky with the matchups and ice time. Looking at the data, I'm not sure Maurice was concerned about chasing any particular matchup. Either he has confidence in his better lines to outskate Vegas, or he just wants to get his better players more ice time, or a combination of factors.

The below data tables shows the percentage of minutes Vegas skaters played against Winnipeg forwards and defencemen. To me, it's a clear indication that Winnipeg was fine playing best against best:

The Karlsson, Marchessault, and Smith line were heavily matched up against Winnipeg's Scheifele line – about two-thirds of their shifts saw direct head-to-head action. You can see the trickle-down effect from there. The Erik Haula line matched up heavily against Stastny's line, the Cody Eakin line matched up heavily against the Bryan Little line and the Pierre-Edouard Bellemare line saw significant time against Adam Lowry and company. The defensive matchups followed in a similar pattern.

The Vegas top line was in on both of their goals, but the first came on a delayed penalty and the second came on the power play, courtesy a Ben Chiarot trip. At pure 5-on-5, the line more or less broke even against Winnipeg's best.

This is precisely the problem for Vegas. Los Angeles made it a point to get Anze Kopitar and Drew Doughty against Vegas' top line. It didn't work, and their depth got hammered on top of that. San Jose made it a point to get Marc-Edouard Vlasic and Justin Braun out against Vegas' top line, but deployed their more talented forwards against Vegas' depth to



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 15, 2018**

try and balance the scoring. That failed too, mostly because San Jose didn't have enough firepower in their bottom six.

Winnipeg is a different animal. Scheifele is good enough to be a matchup problem on his own against Vegas' best unit. Even if that ends up being a wash, it's hard to see where Vegas has remaining advantages further down the lineup. It's hard to make a 'Vegas has depth' argument when you still have talents like Nikolaj Ehlers, Stastny, Laine, Little, and Mathieu Perreault to play a bunch of minutes against your weaker forward and defensive groups.

Attention now will turn to Vegas coach Gerard Gallant. Do you roll with what got you to the Conference Final, or do you make lineup adjustments because of the challenges the Winnipeg lineup poses? We will find out Monday night.

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